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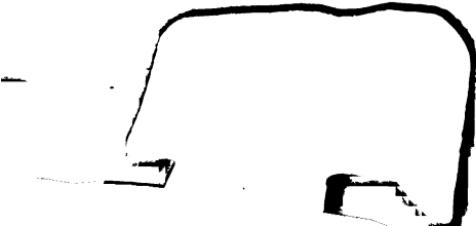
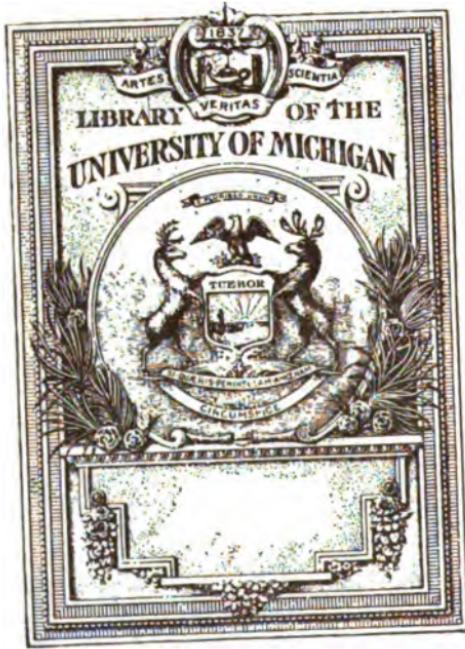
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# THE CALL OF THE MATE

BY  
**C<sup>A</sup> FRANCIS BURTON**



BOSTON  
SHERMAN, FRENCH & COMPANY  
1917

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Replacement, Stacks

3-30-1923

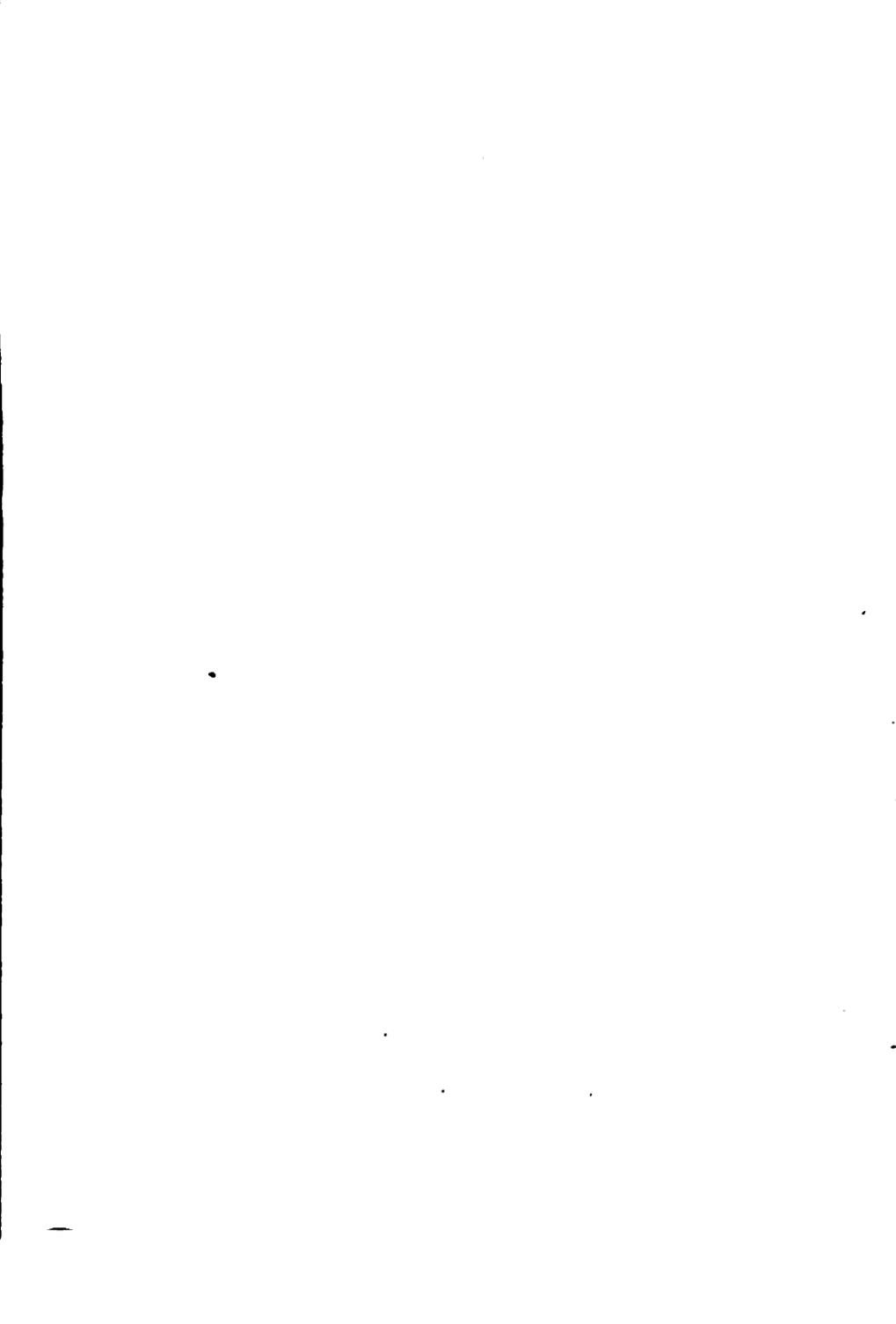
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**TO**  
**MY WIFE**

**420628**



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## **THE CALL OF THE MATE**



## CHAPTER I

### THE DIM HORIZON

No horizon is so dim or far away that another just beyond, more dim, more remote and formidable, does not level across the boundless blue. The skyline beyond the Chilco ranch to the north, jagged, rocky, somber, held a repellent warning to the pioneer of the soil, for its mysteries were those of the gold seekers who do not stop until the end has been reached. Then they may turn back, blear-eyed, forlorn, disheartened, perhaps, with shoulders stooped, hope blasted on the once eager faces, with the trembling hands which cold and exposure imposes, and with a story which the heart longs to tell to a willing listener.

Circled by the broad rim of this distant horizon was a green meadow, ringed with a forest of pine, spruce and fir. On the south edge of the sixty-acre meadow was a cabin of logs; a curl of smoke told of life within. A creek cut the grassy meadow through the center, and to it a few head of cattle had made their way for a drink and were now returning to the corral.

“Momsy! Momsy!” came an insistent cry. Popsy’s voice came through the kitchen door at the back of the cabin and was startling, and full of invocation.

Momsy dropped the cake pan and hurried to the door.

"What is it?" Momsy, hurrying to the side of her mate, looked in the direction his gaze directed. She had never heard such a voice betray that heretofore guarded chamber of Popsy's soul.

"Come here — look! look!" Popsy's eyes had lost their meditation. They were pointed, fixed and anxious, staring at the crest of the Chilco range glittering in the snowy, crystal sunset far above the timbered slope. Momsy clutched the strong, sustaining arm, her eyes swept the bleak rim and finally saw the moving black speck against the clear sky.

"It's some one riding a horse; he is turning this way down the ridge." A foot of snow on Chilco made the wayfarer's going difficult. For several minutes they gazed in silence.

"Watch him, Momsy, while I get the glass." Momsy obeyed, for it was the first of the twenty years that had brought a lonely rider over the dim horizon, out of the land of mystery, out of the storm, out of the north, the cold, the bleak unknown; and it was at the very edge of winter. Swift moving clouds of sifting snow were sweeping the ridge. Popsy was soon back at Momsy's side and trying for a focus. Now the glass was covering the snow.

"He's right under that black bluff just above the timber," said Momsy.

"Momsy!" exclaimed Popsy with a trembling voice. "It's a girl — she is alone. Yes, she must have seen the cabin for she is coming this way. The horse's head is down — it staggers — the girl is clutching the saddle-horn!"

"Oh, Popsy." The woman was getting eager to hold the glass to her own eyes, for she tugged restlessly at Popsy's arm.

"Let me see!" The man watched the lonely rider as if his sustaining gaze was necessary to her safety in making the steep descent along the ridge. Finally he handed the glass to the anxious woman.

She made a long-drawn exclamation of pity when the glass caught the approaching figure. The shadows of night were rapidly climbing the snow of Chilco, making a clear-cut line between the dim blue of the shaded snow and the glittering white. Beyond was the clear cut of lighter blue along the sky-line.

The rider was now entering the rim of shadow; now she was hidden by a mist of blizzly snow. The ridge was narrow and broken, with black rocks specking the threatening slope. A cry went up at Popsy's side, a wail of horror, the glass dropped from the woman's hand.

"What happened, Momsy — speak up!" Popsy reached for the glass at her feet.

"The horse stumbled and fell, and the rider went over the side of the ridge." Momsy looked into the eyes of the man with imploring fear. Without hesitation Popsy started up the hill.

"Better wait here, Momsy. I'll bring her down if she is hurt."

She watched him as he hurried past Elizabeth's grave and out of view into the timber. She searched the ridge again with dim eyes. Soon the riderless pony came down the point and entered the timber. Her heart was beating out the expectant moments

in a desperation, waiting for Popsy to come back. She watched the glitter of the snows narrow on Chilco's western slope and soon there was no glitter to separate the blue of the sky from the somber blue of the shadowed snow. Her heart continued to throb with expectation and apprehension as she paced about. The pony hurried to the meadow and began to graze glutonously on the frozen grass near the corral. Over anxious, Momsy started up the hill and met Popsy carrying the girl in his strong arms, panting with exhaustion yet hurrying on as rapidly as he could.

"Popsy, is she dead?" The girl lay silent against the heaving breast of the man, her face white and ashy and her arms hanging limply down.

"Unconscious," said Popsy, trudging toward her as she ran to meet him. "We must get her in out of the cold as soon as possible."

Popsy laid the lifeless form down carefully on a bed and stretched the two limp arms down at her sides. Momsy bent over her, then straightened up and looked strangely, understandingly at Popsy. Then she gently drew off the fur cap, which had been made by the girl herself from the skin of a wolf. She stroked the smooth brown locks, then drew the mittens, made, perhaps, from the same wolf, from the unresisting hands. Kneeling before the bed Momsy's hand stole within the heavy mackinaw coat, buttoned about the breast, and rested there for many minutes. When she got up with a glance at Popsy, a heavy sigh told the meaning of her thoughtful mood.

For many minutes they watched the face of the child, for a movement of the eyelids, a vibration of the lips, for a sign of returning life. The storm was in the pretty face, the north, the snow, the silence, the wilderness and desolation. It had drawn heavily upon them all for it was innocent, alert, eager, full of passion, love; the strength of the wilderness, the color of the open. The skin was dense and firm, the mouth full of longing life, but the eyes were nearly closed and were very still and glassy under the drawn lids. It was a face that spoke plainly of story, romance and the lines of sadness were very recent in the making, for they cut the face like a mask that might be removed with forgetfulness. She could not be more than sixteen.

The two stepped quietly out of the room without speaking. Momsy followed Popsy to the corral, where he caught the pony and took off the saddle and bridle. To the pommel of the saddle was tied a home-made bag in which were a few crumbs but nothing else. Momsy followed the man about in troubled silence, then they turned to the house and again entered the room where the child lay just as they had left her. The eyes were half closed and there was no movement of the breast. Nothing could be found telling who she was or from what pitiless world she had come over Chilco to her fate. Momsy took the cold hand in hers again and held it for many minutes, then under the coat her right one rested anxiously. Again she got up with that same strange look at Popsy, watery-eyed.

"She is dead," she said. "She came to us too

late, poor child. We shall never know why she came, never know her story, if she had a story to tell."

Then the two went to the kitchen and shut the door to close out the death silence of the room.

## CHAPTER II

### THE LITTLE VISITOR

The coming of the little dead visitor brought back vividly the day their own child Elizabeth was taken to the yellow frosted willow to have a gust of chilly wind cover the grave with dead leaves. The sad eyes of Popsy and Momsy had strayed to each other's, misty, dim, questioningly, several times as they sat in the kitchen after the evening meal. It was Momsy's soul-touched voice that broke the silence.

"What are we to do, Popsy?" The flicker of the dim oil light full on her face softened the lines that had come on the north wind for many a year. It had not appeared to the kind-hearted Momsy that she was forcing back the apparent thing to do in such a case. Her husband cast a hurried glance to her and as quickly turned his profile against the black curtain of the night window, thoughtful, stern, full of battle, full of strife, deeper-hardened by adversity and struggle. Now that the little visitor lay in the next room with the door closed between them, the vindictive demon within him had taken the quiet corner of patience in his heart.

"I think Freddy North has lumber at his ranch; I shall go over for him in the morning, then we shall lay her under the willow close where Elizabeth sleeps." That was the thought Momsy was fighting

back. On the child's face was a cry for help and she could not accept the death sentence that shut out that plea.

"Can we do nothing else, Popsy?" There was distress, sympathy in the low tones. "Perhaps she was coming for aid; perhaps, some one over the Chilco range needs us; some one may be dying, a father, a loved one. She might be a wife, as young as she is."

Popsy's head shook to show the futility of any effort to give assistance, for even the distances on the dim horizon were appalling and prohibitive. Indeed, it was a big north, an infinite, unbounded wilderness out of which the child had come but the appeal, the pitiful, pleading, invoking face went deep into the woman's heart and she wanted the child's story. The fact that she could do nothing at this moment to relieve the suffering would not let her rest. She could hear voices in the silence.

"I shall bring Freddy back with me," said Popsy. "He has been in the north and may know who the girl is. Next summer we can send word of her misfortune, but now the north is closed by the snow."

Momay sank back in her chair and they sat in silence for three hours until the man's eyes closed and the tired head went back. Crossing the room where the child lay silent and still, they both turned for another glance at the pretty, pleading face and the woman could not but think a secret lay under the half-closed lids and she lingered while the man went to his bed. There were no pennies in the north so the woman stole quietly to her purse and taking out two silver coins went back and gently closing the

lids placed them on the lifeless eyes. Going to her room she told Popsy what she had done.

Early the next morning Popsy started out for Freddy's place in his wagon. Freddy had a past, a gun, and a scar on his left cheek cutting the full width of his jaw; a cabin and a meadow seven miles from Popsy's, but these facts did not make so much difference as the one that he had a few boards out of which a box might be made. Freddy, also, had a negative side to his life as prominent as the positive mentioned. He never told of the scar on his left cheek, in fact the memory of it closed the day he came to build his cabin on upper Chilco to the north and west of Popsy's. He never smiled, and he had never let any one look at the handle of his gun.

Popsy drove up to the cabin with Freddy just at noon.

"We have been wondering, Freddy, if by any chance you might know our little visitor?" Momsy led him to the room where she lay. Freddy stared a moment and shook his head.

"Do you think she was coming to you?" asked Freddy. "You don't know her?"

"Popsy once had a half brother go into the north," said Momsy thoughtfully.

"He told me."

"Perhaps we shall never know," said Momsy, "but some one has missed a great love, or lost it, for her heart was kind, I am sure. I can see how tender a soul she had even though it has gone now. She was too pretty to die so young. She did not get more than her share of happiness, I know. It is a cruel north."

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"Yes. I was there once. Perhaps she has escaped a great punishment."

Still Freddy watched as if waiting for the eyes to open, the lips to part, and love to take up its parted abode again.

"Maybe she was going to Pete Harvey's place. They live only fifteen miles from here. I believe I shall ride over tonight to see if they might know of her. We can bury her tomorrow," said Freddy.

"Do, Freddy. Her coming this way has upset me and I cannot help thinking that she had come to tell us something, that she wanted our help, for she rode down off Chilco straight to the cabin, but her pony was so tired and starved that he fell. They must have come a long ways and the grass is covered with snow. She must have been afraid of getting snow-bound and urged the pony on too fast in her eagerness. She ought to have let him pasture more, poor child."

Freddy stepped closer to the form on the bed, watching the face intently.

"Does she look like some one you have seen, Freddy?" asked Momsy, seeing how eagerly he was studying the face.

"No one," said Freddy stepping back. "If you didn't have them silvers there, I would say she was only sleeping. Guess some one has missed life when she came this way."

Momsy turned from the room and Freddy soon followed. He worked under the willow on the bench above the cabin until three o'clock, then rode one of Popsy's bays over to Harvey's ranch on Fawn creek. Still Popsy was working at the work-bench at the tool-shed. After Freddy rode out across the

meadow Momsy sat down on a block of wood and watched him for many minutes. Finally he put down his plane, brushed off a few shavings from the work-bench listlessly, and turned to the woman thoughtful and troubled.

"Been thinking of brother Tom since she came," said Popsy, brushing his hand across his somber face, as if to clear his memory. "It seemed like something snapped within me, Momsy, and I can't get it out. Couldn't sleep last night, and all day I been thinking."

"Yes, your brother Tom," said the woman.

"Yes. You remember the day we quarreled eighteen years ago. I have never given him a thought since. When I accused him he made no reply, in his impudent way; but the next morning he was gone and he left his place across the creek there for us." Popsy's face told that those eighteen years were being heaped back upon him, and that a consciousness that he was in the wrong hurt him.

"It was best that distance should divide us," he continued. "To have lived long on opposite banks of a small stream would have meant tragedy in the end. I have been wondering if his indolence, his failure to make an effort for success in life were not, in fact, but dreams of the north out of which our little visitor came. The wanderlust was in his veins, visions of great wealth drove him here and yet he was not satisfied. He could lay a blanket down in the snow with a black log for a wind break, come in each night with sore heels and wet feet, eat a crust of bread and call it play. His youth was that way. It's the way he wanted to make his fortune — siwash

through and through. I was glad he went, but now—" He glanced furtively at Momsy, for she had taken the part of Tom in that quarrel.

"Freddy went over to Pete Harvey's to see if by any chance they could know of our little stranger. Do you think she could have been coming to us?" asked Momsy to turn from the subject of brother Tom. To linger on that theme would soon fan Popsy's passion.

"Been thinking about it," he said. "I haven't been so upset since we laid Elizabeth under the willow on the bench." Popsy was now pacing restlessly before the work-bench. Taking up his plane he set to work again with vigor.

Momsy went to the cabin and to the bedroom. She could not resist another glance at the little visitor. With a cry she ran out of the kitchen door and down the path to where Popsy was at work.

"Popsy!" she cried.

He turned up with questioning, almost condemning gaze.

"Did you take the coins —"

"What coins?"

"The ones I put on her — her eyes?" Momsy's face was full of alarm. "They are gone."

A few moments of silence went into thought. Dubiously they faced each other.

Then Momsy half whispered her accusation. "Do you think Freddy could have taken them. He was in the room alone before he went to Harvey's. I never saw anyone look so long and intently at the dead. I wondered then what was in his thoughts. He seemed to be planning."

## CHAPTER III

### ARDA

The task at the work-bench was finished; the task under the willow was finished; Popsy and Momsy had drawn back from the supper table and were sitting in somber silence when a voice came, sharp, shrill and desperate. "Up, Light Foot, git up, O —o—o!" The glaring, ghastly stare of the two met across the table in a wild, questioning suspense. Both knew that the sound came from the adjoining room where the little visitor lay. In spite of his fearlessness and his strong body Popsy led the way to the room with shaking limbs.

A white hand had been drawn up to the little visitor's head and lay across the pretty face. Another glance between the man and the woman banished fear. Momsy knelt down beside the bed while Popsy stood by. A trickle of blood was in the brown locks and a blotch was on the pillow.

"Oh, Popsy, is she coming back to us?" asked Momsy, her eyes watery with joy. He did not answer, but his face hardened a little. Momsy took the chilly little hand in hers and again the lids were half drawn almost lifelessly over the weary eyes. Momsy's hand stole under the mackinaw coat and a throb brought tears of happiness to the eyes of the childless mother. Popsy sat down in a gloomy cor-

ner of the room and for more than an hour the two waited for another cry, another movement of the eyes and the lips, while the woman knelt beside the little visitor. An arm lay across the breast of the child, a hand was in a hand, as Popsy watched with dry, burning eyes. The mother's were red and wistful. Soon a color shot to the pallid lips and mounted to the cheeks of the sun. Then again, "Up, Light Foot, git up, O—o—o!" The lids folded under the brow, and the eyes had a focus and were no longer velvety, but sparkling and pointed. "Oh,—o—o!" Momsy's arm tightened about the form, her head went down on the heaving breast, and Popsy got to his feet and looked down into the tired little face.

"She has come back; she has come back," said Momsy, and this was the first realization the girl had that loving, tender arms were about her. Girl and woman were trembling, one with cold and the other with returning joy of life.

"It is so cold here in the snow. Please take me in. Light Foot threw me over the point there. How far is it to your cabin? Father sent me—"

Her voice broke and the lids closed wearily over the tired eyes and she shivered.

"Popsy, kindle a fire. We have been freezing her," said Momsy, drawing the blankets over the child. "Poor little visitor," wailed Momsy. Her memory had a little race with time, spanning that chasm back to Elizabeth.

When the fire was crackling, the two went to the kitchen, while the child lay as if sleeping. Momsy, with the greatest passion since Elizabeth had lived,

the man troubled, sullen, pacing the floor. "Popsy, don't ever tell her about the box and the grave under the willow. You must fill it up tomorrow so she will never know. She has borne too much already. How fortunate she came back." But Popsy had memories, galling and insistent, which Momsy could not soften with her tender hope and love.

"We may need it yet," said Popsy sulkily.

"Oh, Popsy, don't say that; I want her. She is alone and needs us so much. She will brighten the years that are to come and turn back the silence that has haunted us. She will take away the scene that comes to us always from the willow where we once made a grave. No, Popsy, you must fill it up."

"She is Tom's. He sent her. She is his. Just like his impudence after what has happened!" Popsy's face with grim lines was working back across the span of twenty years, for that old forgotten combat, the quarrel that had somehow gotten into the little visitor's veins.

"I am going to teach her to call me mother." It was her heart that spoke, but not to the man beside her. Popsy felt that she was speaking into the dim horizon to his brother Tom. He saw a woman's determination in the loving face, he felt the chill of it, the desolation of it against his soul. His lips tightened, his muscles hardened and he stepped out of the room into the night, and did not enter again for more than two hours. This girl had broken the tie, in the darkness he was fighting back the past, but it all heaped drearily into his life.

Momsy was rocking beside the little visitor when

he entered, but Jim Langborn did not turn to the bed. The chill of the snow was leaving the trembling form over which Momsy watched with very wistful eyes. At ten o'clock the little visitor opened her eyes again and a smile stole into them. They were as deep as the interminable sky and something twinkled in the great depths of blue. Momsy bent over her.

"What did you come to tell us, little visitor, who was it sent you to us? Is he sick, dying and you want us to go to help you save him?"

Never had such eyes looked squarely, unafraid into Momsy's, never had such a face turned up to her own. Soon the visitor found sympathy and trust in the woman and she said:

"He is dead," said the trembling lips afraid to speak the words. "I buried him alone far away." Silence spanned the desolation and memory brought the past safely across.

"Your name is Mandy?" asked the girl.

"Yes," said Momsy, "and yours is what?"

"Arda."

"Arda what?"

"That is all. There were just us two, never any one else. He was father and I was Arda," said the girl. Her voice was as unoffending as the breeze in the evergreens that had never been maddened by the storm. It went to the very soul and touched it gently. Jim made no movement in the chair across the room, but his body was burning and he had no doubt that Tom had sent her.

"He sent you to us. You were coming here when the pony stumbled and fell?" asked Momsy.

"Yes."

"He did not tell you why he was sending you to us?"

The little head turned on the pillow with negative answer. Didn't these people want her? There was no other place or her father would not have sent her here. Why these people might take her in she did not know, had not questioned. She simply came as her father had directed when he was dying in the far north.

"You never knew your mother?"

"Just father," was the listless answer.

"How did you know where to come if you were so far away? Wasn't it awful finding your way in the snow?" asked Momsy.

"Father brought me to the rim of Chilco every summer to look down on the meadow. I used to like to come then. He would stand on the rocks way up there for an hour each time we came and then we would go away again. He never told me why he came, never would he speak after we left the rim until we had reached the meadow on the other side. His face was like the rock under the snow and I knew something was bringing him year after year, some memory he wanted to keep clear in his mind."

Jim moved in his chair restlessly for he knew the manner of the man. He had come to curse him and he had hurled it back.

"But this time you didn't like to come," said Momsy, brushing back the brown locks from the innocent eyes.

"Not and leave father there the way I did. I had to come 'cause he told me to. The snow was

a foot deep when I left our cabin and there was not much grass for Light Foot or he wouldn't a-stumbled the way he did. It was a long ride —” Arda gave a sudden start. “ How many sticks be there in my coat pocket? ” said Arda drawing up her mackinaw. She took them out and counted thirteen.

“ Thirteen days I been coming.”

“ Unlucky,” said Jim from the silent corner of the room.

“ Now you are going to call me mother, ain’t you, Arda? ” Momsy’s eyes were pleading, and the girl looked deep into them inquiringly.

“ Is he your mate? ” asked Arda, with a suspicious glance toward the corner.

“ Yes, Arda.”

“ I’d never call him my father, never, not so long as I can remember my own, but you’re different.”

“ Then I can be a mother to you? ”

“ Ain’t you ever been called that, ” said the whimsical little eyes with a smile of indifference.

“ Just for a little while, Arda. I want to be called that always. She would have been like you.”

“ Never, ” said the man in the corner, which drew a quick glance from the girl, but she was not in the least disconcerted.

“ Maybe I ain’t going to stay here to call you mother —”

“ I thought you come to stay with us, Arda? ” said Momsy, patiently.

“ Maybe you won’t want me to call you that when you know how father sent me.”

“ Why, Arda? ”

The snappy blue eyes smiled up to the woman’s.

"Father said just like this before he left me in the north alone, 'Go to Jim Langborn's and tell him I hate him, that I die with curses on my lips for him, then if the woman wants you, take off your mackinaw and kick it under the table to show the man that my blood is in your veins. If she don't want you, go to the cabin across the creek. It's mine, he stole it, but you kill him if he comes to drive you out. Take from the woman but never ask or accept a favor of Jim Langborn if you die.'" Momsy hid her eyes, there was a silence. She knew Jim was accusing her, compromising her with the past. The girl's words were almost accusing. She would never be Momsy again, a chasm was widening. Jim Langborn went out of the room. She followed him to the kitchen and the girl waited to see if she would call this woman mother.

"I'll keep her, Jim," said Momsy.

His eyes flashed, his steel body vibrated. "And you want her to call you mother more than you want me to call you Momsy?" he hissed. "You will sacrifice the memory of Elizabeth. It was her coming and going that brought the names by which we have spoken to each other so long."

"Elizabeth would have me do it if she were here," said Momsy, meeting the flash he gave, unafraid.

"Take her, but remember that she earns every morsel that slips down her slimy gullet, every thread that clothes her infamous back. If Tom were here I would kill him. I ought to have killed him that day. You loved him and married me, that is why you want his child to call you mother. You want his memory more than mine."

Jim Langborn went hurriedly out of the room. The new mother went back to the bed-side and her passion was soothed by the glance that met her own.

"Yes, Arda, I want you to call me mother, always," she said, holding the lips up to hers.

"Do I have to call him 'father'?"

"No."

"Mother," came from the pallid lips, and she tried to lift her lips up to meet the ones that came down to her own. Arda had heard harsh words in the kitchen and had connected herself in some unaccountable way with them. Yet she knew that the new mother was happy, that she had made her happy. She had brought something into the Langborn home that she could not guess the meaning of.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE PICTURE HAS NO SCAR

All of Jim Langborn's hatred and jealousy for the once living brother came out of the past and centered upon the little visitor. No longer did the name "Popsy" and "Momay" weld a paternal bond between the man and the woman. Arda was driven by the one, and petted by the other. Arda came to be thoughtful, meditative and troubled, even the pictures she had made over the dim horizon did not always wear a smile now. Often Freddy came down the Chilco at the foot of the range to return home after the stars had pinned back the curtain of night.

The little visitor worked in the field, milked the cows that came in each night from the meadow or off the bench above the willows. The tender grass along the creek had straightened up from the weight of the winter snows and pointed straight to the sun; the willows were green and their leaves rustled in the evening breezes. Arda's cheeks lost none of their color; her strong, yet lithe little body lost none of its health and nimbleness; her form lost none of its grace, her steps were light and agile, and she could run like a deer.

"She's dreaming devilment like her sneaking father," said Jim.

Only a sigh went from the new mother's lips in

answer. Always she went with Arda to the willow where Elizabeth lay, never with Jim as she had for fifteen years, but when Arda went across the creek to the cabin her father had said Jim Langborn had stolen, no one presumed to intrude. Many hours had been spent there with her chin resting on her hands, her eyes reaching to the dim horizon which closed out the north except to memory and imagination.

It was August, hot and dry; the grain had been stacked and the meadow had two monuments of hay. Early one Sunday morning, before Chilco cast its early shadow across the meadow, the new mother and Jim started out on the road to the west. Arda rode Light Foot behind, for the annual festivities of the Chilco country were being held at Harvey's on Fawn creek and Freddy was to be there also. About two miles up the road Freddy was waiting and drew up beside Arda with a glance that meant a thrill within his breast. Arda smiled an appreciative welcome but the heart throb that would jar the whole earth so that she might feel it, no matter how far away, was still beating against the other side of the world in the dim unknown. Freddy thought those throbs were soon to beat heart to heart and he was beginning to claim his possession with imperious demands.

"Better invite them up to the head of Chilco next year, eh, girl?" said Freddy with an authoritative raising of his eyebrows.

She turned to the dim horizon.

Freddy watched her profile with vibrating lips as she spoke and was about to press his claims, when

passing about a bend, they saw that Jim had stopped in the road and was looking back.

"Come, drive here," said Jim. "I want to talk with Freddy."

Jim's orders never included her name, but she obeyed without complaint. She would far rather ride beside her new mother than Freddy. Climbing to the wagon seat beside her, Arda took the reins and started the team up the rough road. The two men fell behind, out of earshot.

Her mother's eyes were red and filmy, and she glanced up wistfully at the girl several times before speaking.

"Be you going up Chilco to live, Arda?" she asked with sympathy in the watery eyes.

"Did Freddy tell you I was?" asked the girl, touching the horses with the whip to hasten up the rough road.

"No, Arda." Two silent glances went across the wilderness.

"Jim told you?"

"Yes."

"Arda, are we driving you out, are we compelling you to accept his offer?" wailed the woman.

Arda made a few deft strokes with her paint-brush across the canvas of her heart.

"Things ain't the same since I came, be they, new mother? Jim gone to ride with Freddy to plan my going up Chilco. He wants things back I took, don't he — I didn't mean to take 'em, mother, and I got to give 'em back to you both."

"Oh, forgive me, Arda, if you are going just for us." The reins hung down and the horses were tak-

ing their own time along the road, with an occasional stealthy nip at the grass unnoticed.

"Maybe I'll go back to the north where I left father. I just can't complete the picture, new mother, can't get a scar on it and until I do I won't go up Chilco. The picture has got to be all done before I make any call to the mate. It's got to have a nose, a chin and hair and I been afraid to put Freddy's on my picture for there can never be but one, just one picture. Sometimes I'm almost afraid it's going to have a scar, after all."

"Because we are driving you out," said Mandy, brushing a handkerchief across her eyes.

For many minutes the silence argued pitifully, pleading for the little visitor from the north, and Mandy's conscience was full of pain.

"Arda, you can't go back up there alone."

"Maybe I will," she said.

They drew up to Harvey's cabin at eleven. Every hand went to every other hand and Arda's was the last. "I want to see your little visitor," said the mistress of the Fawn creek ranch and she threw her arms about Arda and kissed the pretty little cheeks which had the color of the sunset in them, then she held her at arm's length and studied the face with evident approval. Her own two children watched bashfully and rebelliously, for their throbbing hearts were jealous of the kisses. When they had entered the cabin, Sammie sat in the corner of the room and watched Arda with sullen displeasure. Arda's sharp eyes strayed to the lad many times, but always to catch his turning swiftly away. His little sister had decided it safe to ask the little visitor a question.

"Can you read?" she asked, with eager eyes turned up into Arda's.

"So can I," and she stammered out a few words from the pages of a picture book. "How did you learn to read way up in the snow? Do they have snow fairies up there? Did they learn you how to write on the snow with a stick?"

"What did you write?" Here the girl of six gave the little visitor a chance to answer.

"I wrote letters to mother and left them in the forest for the snow fairies to take to her."

Little Dorothy's eyes danced. "Did the fairies find them and ever bring an answer?"

Arda's head made negative answer. Freddy had now come into the room and was listening intently.

"Can you draw pictures of cows and rabbits and hens?" Arda looked about, and seeing that Freddy had entered the room only nodded.

"Could you make Freddy's picture?" asked the child. A flush came to Arda's cheeks and she did not answer. "Could you make the scar?" persisted the girl, but her mother now took her roughly by the shoulder and led her from the room. Jim and Pete Harvey came in and talked over a whole year of loneliness while the others remained silent.

After dinner when the three neighbors were seated about the room a most remarkable thing happened. Little Dorothy came out of the bedroom with a photograph, as proud as a mountain grouse in the spring before nesting time. She wanted every one to see the picture, for it was one of her mother's nephew which Pete had got from the post-office on his last trip to the railroad. Dorothy went from

one to the other with the photograph for an exclamation of approval. Arda's was the last eyes to look at the picture. It had been taken the day Halford Chase had graduated at Yale.

How long Arda looked at the picture she had no means of knowing, for dreams are not measured by time. The others had become silent; they were watching her but she did not know. The horizon, the broad ring that circled her in, had widened and she could not see Jim Langborn's frown or Freddy's knitted brow. The smile of her picture was before her, and the heart throb that could jar the whole earth came to her across a continent, and the eyes had the interminable blue in them and there were no clouds. The curtain was pinned back with stars that she might look into the depths down to the very throb of the heart she could feel. Arda was hastily completing her picture and was about to sweep the color of the sunset over the cheeks when she felt a blow on the side of her head that for a moment stunned her. She staggered from her seat; the photograph was snatched from her trembling hand. For a moment she could not gather consciousness, then looking up she saw Jim's angry eyes flashing down at her as she struggled to her feet. "Makin' a little fool of yerself, be you?" he said.

There was no other sound in the room; she did not turn to see Freddy's livid, jealous face. Arda turned quickly to the kitchen door. Mandy Langborn followed her.

"I am going," said Arda when the two were alone with a closed door between them and the others.

The eyes were filled with indignation ; they were flashing with stormy anger.

"Arda, you shouldn't have looked at the picture so long that way. They understood. Couldn't you see how it hurt Freddy after he had invited us all up to the head of Chilco for our next gathering?"

"I don't care. I am going. He has no right to ask 'em. Him and Jim done it to force me to put a scar on my picture."

"Didn't you tell him he might?"

"I told him he couldn't," stormed Arda.

Mandy took the girl in her arms and kissed the vibrating cheeks, but Arda was inconsolable. She found her coat and hurried to the stable, threw the saddle on Light Foot's back and mounted. She had not gone far up the road when she heard horse's feet closing in, and soon Freddy drew up at her side.

"The picture has got no scar, Freddy," said the girl, looking up the road to the dim horizon. "And there is never going to be but one picture."

"I'm going to have you; you are mine. By god, you belong to me," said Freddy, and he reached out his strong arm and drew her to him. Her eyes flashed up. The fire of the wilderness was in them, yet she was afraid Freddy might carry out his threat. She gave a quick twist to free herself, then she felt Freddy's fingers tighten on her wrist and she could not reach her gun.

"If you kiss me, Freddy, I will kill you. I say, the picture has no scar," and she struggled futilely to release herself. The cut of Freddy's scar deepened, he laughed with a devil in it but he made no

movement toward her lips. She saw how useless her struggle was.

"I am going to kiss you. The picture will never get the first one — it's mine."

She bent her head down. "It belongs to the picture. They are all his — don't you dare kiss me, Freddy, for if you do spoil my picture, I will kill you." But Freddy's hand was lifting her head up.

"Freddy! Freddy!" she said in a desperation. "I will shoot with you to see if I put a scar on my picture. It will be better. If you kiss me without my consent I will kill you, but if you shoot and win I will go with you, otherwise you get one kiss and die for it." She knew she was taking desperate chances, but her kisses belonged to the picture and she would never, never dare to offer only a part of them after saving them so long.

Freddy was delighted. He released her trembling form and sprang to the ground, confident of success. "I knew you would give me my chance, girl. I will win; you are as good as mine."

He quickly tied his horse to a willow. Arda jumped from Light Foot, but she knew she could not win unless she recovered, for she was trembling in every fiber. The struggle had unnerved her. She led Light Foot back down the road a short distance simply to get control of her shattered nerves.

"Twenty paces, Freddy, and the best three out of five shots."

"Make it two out of three."

"No, Freddy."

"All right," said Freddy, going to a tree. Taking out an old letter, he pinned it to the tree. "It's

the size of a man's heart, girl, and I will get it." Then pacing back he drew a line from which they were to shoot. Still she was trembling and Freddy smiled confidently.

"Just a moment, Freddy." Freddy was hurrying too fast. She must get a little more time. "If you win I go to Chilco; if I win it's all ended between us. That is the bargain?"

Freddy hesitated. "Is it settled? Do you agree?"

"W'y, girl, better not say that. You are a damned little fool to make a picture the way you have. He wouldn't have you. He's a dude Eastern; you'll want me yet."

"But it is for me to say. They are my kisses and my picture, Freddy."

"If you win, yes."

Freddy drew his gun. "Here's to the heart of dude Eastern," and he fired. He got the edge of the paper and came back from the tree whistling.

Arda adjusted her hat to shade her eyes. She missed the paper entirely.

"One step up the Chilco trail, little girl," said Freddy. She must get control of herself or blot out the picture forever from her heart, for she had promised and honor is a sacred thing.

"I want a bull's-eye in the target, Freddy," she said to gain a little more time.

"Anything to suit the bride," said Freddy, going to the tree, making a small round black spot in the center of the envelope.

"Expect to get it this time, eh, girl?"

In his confidence Freddy missed the paper and

Arda got within the rim. She knew now that she would win. Freddy was too ready, too eager for the prey. Something would send her bullets straight, something would turn his away to save her picture. It was an answer to a silent prayer that told her this.

"Got one, girl," said Freddy, but his voice was slightly agitated.

Freddy took more careful aim the next shot and the bullet was inside Arda's last one. "Another step up Chilco. One more and we reach the cabin," said Freddy, feeling sure that she could not beat that last shot. Arda's aim was quick and Freddy came back from the tree with clouded brow.

"Who got it, Freddy?" she asked.

"Dude Eastern, damn him! But I get the next two." Exultation whirled in Arda's soul. She only needed one out of two now.

Freddy's fourth shot was only an inch from the bull's-eye, and he whistled again. Now Arda had calmed every nerve, for Freddy's was a true aim and close to the center. When she fired, he ran to the tree and threw down his gun, curses hissing between his teeth. Arda had won; she felt something pounding within her.

"Did the picture win, Freddy?" He did not answer. Picking up his gun he said, "I will kill the one that gets your kisses, girl. Understand, kill him," he threatened.

"Just a minute, Freddy. I am going to get the bull's-eye next time. We still have another shot apiece." But Freddy mounted and rode away. She

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watched him go in exultation, for she had saved her kisses for the picture.

“Good-by, Freddy,” she shouted after him.  
“Maybe, you kill my picture.”

“To hell with your picture!” he hurled back.

She turned and put a bullet in the bull’s-eye, and smiled out into the dim horizon. “Maybe you don’t, Freddy.

“I saved the kisses, maybe I can save the picture. They belong to each other.”

## CHAPTER V

### SIR HIBERNATUM

Arda watched the road down which Freddy had gone for more than half an hour, and until the feeling that he had made his way to Chilco was quite assuring. About a half mile from the spot where she had won that decisive battle, she turned into the forest and rode straight to the north through the timber. There was no trail, but she sat confidently in the saddle bending and rocking to Light Foot's easy walk, her face set against the dim horizon, the breeze whipping her locks of brown hair about her shoulders and cooling the fever of her mind. Soon she came to a lake about a half mile in width. She had been here many times; it was hidden in the shelter of the wilderness and the waters were warm. Riding to the north side of the lake where a rocky rim broke abruptly into the blue waters with a bench extending back from the shore about twenty inches from the surface of the lake, she turned Light Foot loose to pasture on the meadow grass.

Her clothes lying on a grassy tuft, a few feet from the shore, she stepped to the rim-rock of the lake and stood in her indignation for more than a minute like a wood sprite, a fairy, a nymph with her brown locks hanging down her white shoulders. Then she leaped into the water and her head did not shoot to

the surface until she was thirty feet from the rim. Keeping about forty feet from the shore, she swam with more than her usual swiftness in deference to the mood which was shaping her future. Every muscle tingled with offended life. She splashed the water with her restless feet. Her thoughts were to the north where she had buried her father, a land more silent than the wilderness about Chilco range which rose up out of the timber a short distance away to hide the land of her youth. It was coming fall and it was best not to return to the north alone. Next spring she would go to the nest her father had made in the silence.

Turning in the water with an agile twist of her lithe body she started toward the rim where she had left her clothes. The sun, low on the western horizon, amber and gold in the haze of the west, was dancing in dazzling brilliancy on the reflecting ripples of the lake. A movement on the rocky rim where her clothes lay, blackened the tail of her eye and Light Foot, with an alarmed snort, ran down the shore of the lake to a safe distance and scanning the rim for a moment commenced eating again.

Arda watched the rim with alert eye as she approached the shore, and was drawing herself up on the rock when a huge bear raised up out of the grass not ten feet away and growled with his wild, small eyes upon her. She pushed herself free of the rocky rim to a safe distance and standing upright in the lake with a deft movement of her feet, observed the ferocious and intruding beast quizzically. It was not an unfamiliar scene to the girl and his presence brought no terror; in fact a quaint smile stole over

her face. She was certain of safety as long as she remained in the water.

"Goin' to doll yourself up in my clothes, was you, Sir Hibernatum?" The bear showed his ivory teeth and they snapped together angrily. "Oh, you're a pal of Freddy's, be you? He wanted to steal my kisses, the ones I been saving for the picture; and besides, if I didn't have a picture, I wouldn't scatter my kisses like men do wild oats. They are all for the picture, Sir Hibernatum. You got less respect for a gal than Freddy, and you're going to take my clothes, be you?" The bear lay down, crossed his huge paws and rested his long, broad head on them and watched the girl in the lake with his sharp eyes.

Arda made a turn about the lake to give the bear time to consider and leave, but when she approached the rim he was still lying on her clothes.

"See here, Sir Hibernatum, you can't shoot like Freddy can, or we might settle this affair; but you just give me my gun which lies right under your head and we will fight the prettiest duel the wilderness has ever seen. Oh, you don't want to give me a show like Freddy did. What could my little hands do alongside o' your big paws?" and she put up her palms out of the water in argument. "Sir Hibernatum, suppose you just trot away behind that bunch of willows while I get my clothes, then you can have the hull forest. Yes, I will go, honest I will, because I don't like you."

But the bear only growled and continued to watch her. He was a young cinnamon, and was fond of showing his importance as monarch of the wilderness.

Arda waited for a moment, and the bear showing

no inclination to go, she swam up the lake and finding a long dead willow went back to the rocky rim with it. Making her way close, with the willow resting on the rim-rock of the shore, she pushed the end of it slowly to within a foot of the bear's eye, then gave it a quick push. Maddened, the bear sprang to his feet and was at the rim in one leap, but Arda was thirty feet away now, and had stopped as the bear lumbered up and down the rim, growling and panting angrily.

It had been one of her favorite sports in the north to take a bear, which she had tamed, out into the lake and then capsize the boat, in a race for the shore. For bears are cumbersome swimmers. She knew if she could tempt the bear into the water she could get her clothes and perhaps kill the impudent beast. With the pole she poked the bear in the sides and once she thought he was going to leap into the water after her, but he finally continued to pace along the rim-rock with covetous glances at his tormentor.

"Look here, Sir Hibernatum, make up your mind, if you got any, what you're going to do, because it's getting late. The sun has gone down and I got to ride five miles yet, get the cows and milk or I don't get any supper. Jim don't like me the tiniest bit and new mother don't have her own way about me, so I have to work for my bread until I go back up north. Won't you go away just to please me, Sir Hibernatum? If you don't I'm going to get mad, just as mad as I would have been with Freddy if he had taken the kisses I was saving for the picture."

Arda swam up the lake dragging her willow, and

getting out on the rim walked towards the bear with her willow uplifted. The ferocious eyes were upon her and she was impudent to come into his forest. When the willow came down on his very proud and sensitive head the provocation was too much. He could not stop at the water's rim but fell into the lake and pursued the girl out into the center of the lake. Here she led him in a circle and then with every muscle exerted she made straight for the gun that lay on the bank, leaving the bear behind. Sir Hibernatum was forty feet from the shore when Arda commenced firing at him. Soon several streamers of red were coloring the water at the animal's sides. The bear reached the rim and was climbing out when she reloaded her gun. With quick aim she hit the beast just in front of the ear and he went back into the water stunned and for a moment went under. While he was getting out two more shots went to vital spots; one back of the shoulder and one in the neck. Throwing down her gun she dove into the lake and did not come up until she was thirty feet from the shore. Turning, she looked back at the bear standing on the rim with his head down as if crestfallen like a sullen, defeated lover, just like Freddy left her in the road after his defeat.

Sir Hibernatum staggered out into the brushwood fringing the lake and Arda knew he was dying. The color of the northern sunset out of which she had taken the crimson for the picture flashed up into the sky, crept up into the eternal blue and then faded like Sir Hibernatum's blood mixed with the blue of the lake until it was gone. The haze of the sky was

gray when Arda pulled herself out of the lake and saw the bear lying in the pines where he had gone in his shame for what he had done. Dressing quickly and buckling her belt about her waist, she went to her conquered foe whose flanks were still working like a bellows with hisses from the bleeding nostrils.

"Well, Sir Hibernatum, I won again. You wanted to steal my clothes, so tomorrow I shall come back and get yours. I guess I shall have to put a notch on my gun in remembrance of you."

She ran down the rim of the lake whistling for Light Foot. A whinny came from the timber land and soon the pony stepped out of the shadows. Ready to mount, she turned back to the scene of her victory. The moon had come up and was dancing on the rippling waters; a sound from the far-away summit of Chilco range came on the breeze. It was an eagle's cry and it went into her breast and pierced her heart to bring forth the picture out of that secret and jealously guarded chamber. Would it always be just a picture? He was a dude Eastern and wouldn't want her to have the kisses Freddy would have stolen from her lips. No, it would always be a picture, yet she was glad it was complete and that it had no scar.

Still the cry, the mournful, appealing, distant cry of the eagle came through the night on the dancing moon rays, melancholy, soul-touching and suggestive of the desolation. She listened until the sound died away in the distance of the dim horizon, drawing her heart with it into the desolation. Then she mounted Light Foot and rode out through the forest, singing:

" Hark! 'tis the eagle's call to its mate  
Riding the moonbeams over the lake,  
Out from the crest;  
Oh, 'tis the cry of a mate that is dying,  
Hearing the wings of the one that is flying,  
Home to the nest."

The notes were clear, soft, full and they rang out into the night plaintive, somber, for her soul was with the cry of the eagle in the north.

At the cabin on lower Chilco she met Mandy Langborn ready to start out into the night in search of her.

" Oh, Arda, is that you? Where have you been, what kept you so long? I thought you were lost."

" Yes, it's me, new mother." Arda came running up the path and threw her arms about the woman and told her about the encounter with the bear. Mandy listened intently but as Arda hurried on with her story she saw that a more disturbing incident was troubling new mother's somber face.

" Arda, you shouldn't have done that — looked at the picture so long over at Harvey's."

Arda looked up puzzled. " I shouldn't make a picture? Didn't you make a picture once?"

" Not so everybody could see. Arda, they all understood. They couldn't help but know why you stared so long. He lives in the city, and he is rich, Arda. Don't you understand, he is rich and proud —"

" But he has the smile, new mother, and I heard and felt his heart beats, and there were no clouds in his eyes. I had to complete my picture sometime, and it was all done before I knew; and I can't help it

now. New mother, do you think he ever hears the birds and the eagles; do you think he ever saw a real wild bear; could he fight one the way I did today; could he have beaten Freddy to save his kisses?"

"Now, Arda —"

"Then what has he to be proud of? Isn't the forest the grandest thing? The mountains are always speaking. I hear them. I love the wilderness, new mother. I just know his eyes were made to look into the deep-blue sky. He will love my north, too."

"Poor little visitor," soothed the woman.  
"What did Freddy do?"

Arda told her what had happened. "You see, new mother, when I had finished the picture and it had no scar I had to do something to prevent Freddy from taking my kisses, for when he comes — I mean the picture — I couldn't give him what Freddy had stolen, and he wouldn't want me. I just had to do something, for they all belong to the picture."

But here Jim Langborn came up the path from the stable and Arda ran to the cabin for her milk-pail, trembling. For the blow at Harvey's told her that if Jim Langborn had been cruel in the past he would be merciless now that she had blasted his plan made that day while riding beside Freddy up the road to Harvey's.

## CHAPTER VI

### STRICTLY BUSINESS

Halford Chase stepped from the west-bound train, walking hurriedly through the depot with searching glances about him. At the curb he looked up and down the busy, city streets. No, Herbert had not been sent with the carriage for him. It would have been just as well not to have sent that telegram after getting off the Atlantic liner. It was evident that he had the wrong end of the paternal string which was looped about his neck. While the president of the Chase Manufacturing Company was not pulling at the other end, neither was he making any effort to free the noose.

"I think I shall walk just to see if the American air is as good as that of Europe, and to show the pater that we don't have to be helped about," said Halford Chase with a shrug of his shoulders.

Halford Chase had been degreed a B.A. at Yale in June and stepping out of the front door of that institution, had looked west, then east and decided to cross the pond and after three months wished he had gone west. Now he was as undecided as ever about the noose about his neck. He feared pater might pull sometime. While at Yale, Halford had decided upon the law as a life work. It came to be a haunting dream, a hope, then pater had tied the

noose and gave it a little jerk just to show his independent son that he could do so.

Up town, Halford met Dr. Brewster, who had been degreed medically in his class. He had been Halford's roommate during his junior and senior years and was now practicing his chosen profession in Multnoma.

"Hello, Doctor!"

"Hello, Halford!"

They shook hands cordially. Dr. Brewster surveyed his friend critically. There was a trace of unrest on Halford's face.

"Well, old man, how you making it with that M.D.?"

"Fine, just fine, Halford." A wave of regret flitted over Halford's face; perhaps it was envy. "Got a difficult case and won. The fellow is walking the streets of Multnoma today," said Dr. Brewster.

"Lucky chap," said Halford whimsically. "Here my head is just bulging with the law and pater wants me to give up and go into the factory and learn the business and slip into a pair of his shoes when he is too old to have anything but slippers. Got me yoked like an ox to a cart and there is nothing to do but pull and try to prevent the goad from pricking through my rebellious hide. Doctor, I am sure that if I could just walk into the court-room sometime with a law book under my arm, the whole legal fraternity of the city would tumble out of the court-house windows and I would have judge and jury to myself. What better could a man want than an opportunity of that kind! I would rather be buried alongside Daniel Webster than to inherit

the Chase Manufacturing Company if its present floor space were only a shelf to store its ledgers."

Dr. Brewster sighed with pride at thought of his own profession and with sympathy for his friend.

"How is Alice, doctor; all right, I hope?"

"Expecting you, I presume?" said the doctor.

"No, I didn't send her a word about my coming. It makes no difference with Alice, you know."

Dr. Brewster understood. "I have a patient, Halford, waiting for me. Come up to the house to-night and tell me all about Europe," and he started up the street. "So long, Halford, old man. Come up to-night."

"Not to-night. Alice to-night, you know. Expect me to-morrow night."

He watched his friend vanish in the crowded street, then hurried away through the crowd, dodging carriages, delivery wagons and street cars. Half an hour took him to his own street. Halford began to whistle as he went up the stone steps of the Chase mansion, one of the largest and finest residences in the city.

"Hello, Alfred. Glad to see you again." Halford took the old servant's hand and clasped it effusively. "Never mind my coat, Alfred, let me look after myself. Pater is going to pull his little string soon, and I want to get all the independence out of the game I can. Say, Alfred, you might tell Herbert to go to the depot for my luggage. No, I will tell him, in fact I have a notion to go after it myself. I want to carry this independence thing through."

Halford went about the house to greet the servants, and presented each with a present brought

from "across the pond." At five, pater found his son with much of his usual smile gone from his face.

"W'y, hello, my boy; got home all right, did you?" It was evident that Halford Chase got none of the smile from pater, for the paternal countenance was stern and grave, perhaps a little worried. Still he was strong and vigorous.

"Didn't you get my telegram that I would be here on the 2:35 express?" The two men clasped hands for a moment and their eyes searched each other's for motives.

The brow of Wellington Chase vibrated to tell that his failure to send the carriage was purposefully neglected.

"So I did, Halford," said pater, seating himself. "We are very busy these days and it slipped my mind or I would have sent Herbert for you."

Both men felt the nerve cords tighten with tension. The imperious pater was perhaps as much disturbed by the indifference and independence of the son as Halford was afraid that the noose about his neck might be jerked.

"Well, my boy, I suppose you are ready to enter the mills and go to work, learn the business and take a seat in my office in a few years."

"According to plan."

"According to plan," repeated Wellington Chase, with finality. "That infernal dream of yours that you are Webster, Clay and Marshall all rolled into one must have turned to a puff-ball by this time."

"If it had, you would have stepped on it before now just to watch the puff of it," said Halford

dryly. The pater's face was slightly ruffled by a smile which never reached the surface.

After a moment's silence Halford said, "It is deliciously different to be home again." His eyes swept the room.

"I suppose you stepped across the Mediterranean and kissed the Sphinx."

"Yes, and it tasted like muddy water. But don't tell Alice or she might be jealous. A man who would go so far to kiss a sphinx might be guilty of a more thrilling diversion, she would think."

"Not Alice, my boy. She is too sensible to be jealous. Her heart would never be wrecked that way." Halford took a gold-mounted cigarette case from his pocket and inserted an Egyptian.

"Yes, you are right, father; her life has been tempered beyond the sentimental and emotional state of absolute happiness. However, the idea that all the beauties in the world are on the other side of the Atlantic is a product of discontent. Cologne has been spilled over one half of France and Champagne over the other half. They are both repulsive to me. When it comes to the odorous side of life give me the woods and green fields. The only pretty girl I saw was in the peasant class; and her calico dress, which was of the simplest make, could not spoil or detract from the optical effect of blue eyes and crimson cheeks with a Nile sunset in them. You don't have to doll up real beauty."

Wellington Chase squirmed again. "Some more of your sentiments, Halford. We will talk about Alice when you have finished Europe. I suppose you succeeded in spending a night in the Catacombs."

Halford's face brightened. "I got more history and religion in one night there than in four years at Yale."

Halford puffed twice on his cigarette and said, "Got separated from my guide and rambled for several hours. Finally I sat down and must have fallen asleep. I met the first unlucky chap who was buried there. He was a puny fellow with a spiritual expression on his very grave yet hopeful face. I found that the roll he was carrying stuck in his breast like a spear handle was a copy of the Scripture According to St. John. They didn't accept the Apocryphal Bible down there. I told him that I wanted to know where the door was through which I had entered. He looked puzzled for a moment, I suppose wondering why I should want to leave. Finally he pointed down to my coffin with the lid raised up. 'There's only one other door out of Purgatory and there is such a crowd around it you better look around a bit. St. Peter hasn't opened the door to Paradise yet. Just taking applications and recording credentials.' He told me about how he had been killed by the pagans and then hurried on his way. After awhile I saw an enormous mass of people moving toward a great plain. When they came closer I saw that Augustus Cæsar was being led by a chain about his neck. I asked the first passer-by what they were going to do with him.

"' You see that mountain to the east? ' he asked, pointing. ' He is one of the millions they are taking over there each morning. They set them up in a row and the penitent march by and each one jabs his spear into him and on to the next.'

"I became indignant at once. 'But Christ taught forgiveness,' I said accusingly. 'They intend to forgive Augustus and the rest just as soon as they all put their spears into them,' said the man.

"I was slightly relieved. I then asked him why they were doing it.

"He refuses to carry the scripture with him."

"Now I saw that this man also had a roll in his breast. Just then he called to a comrade and up came several men with rolls in their breasts and a chain was clapped about my neck and before I could complain I was being led in the great caravan. I was led by Martin Luther. 'Look here, Martin,' I said imploringly, 'I am willing to carry one of these rolls if you let me out of the punishment.' He looked at me. 'Can't get one until tomorrow. Should have brought one with you.' And he kept on going. I was set on a rock and tied, then I began to count spears. I counted several million. I sat beside Augustus Cæsar and when the fellow came along peddling rolls I took one and was glad to get it. I pled with Augustus for an hour but he shook his head. 'What are they going to do with him now?' I asked a comrade. We must have traveled a million miles when we came to a great plane where Dante sat on a magnificent throne prescribing punishments, supplementing the Inferno, a dozen volumes every morning, just to get the stubborn ones to carry a roll. Then a fellow told me how they had succeeded in getting Dante. The Devil had him prescribing punishments down below, and had the finest throne in eternity fixed up for him. Satan would not let Dante go. Up till that time they had been punish-

ing Cæsar, Alexander, Charlemagne and Napoleon, each morning, too. They were offered absolution if they would organize and take Dante. 'They accomplished the feat and are over there taking application for Paradise now!' said the fellow."

Noticing that his father seemed bored, he stopped.

"What do you mean to do, Halford, for the benefit of the Chase Manufacturing Company? You haven't said yet."

"I am saving that for a New Year's resolution. I am going west, out to Uncle Pete's ranch for a short time and then go into the mills and learn the business. It's all settled now. I am going to give up the law." Pater's brow clouded.

"What is the use of waiting, why do you put it off?" said Wellington Chase, thinking, perhaps, that his son was still seeking a chance to take up his profession. A little delay might present an opportunity. Halford looked gravely at his father.

"To be frank with you, father, it seems cowardly for me to give up the ambition of my life in order to go into the mills, and always have business, bargain, absolute bargain, a question of profit always bringing back the desire for a profession. I am sick of bargain before I begin. I want just a little more time to set the brakes so I won't run away. My engagement with Alice, if she accepts me, will be bargain. I like her better than any girl I have ever seen or know, but I have never felt her heart throb, never an emotion. When I met the plain peasant girl across the pond with the Nile sunset face I came near picking her up and running away with her, kissing her until she succumbed in my arms. Those in-

sane moments have come often of late. I want to get myself steeled down so that I am not subject to thrills of that kind. Then I will go into the mills."

A few moments of silence brought the conventional lines back to the face of the older man.

"Why are you always groveling close to the ground for your ideals, Halford!"

"It's in the blood. You took mother from a farm. Men were made of dust, you know. We shall never get the ideal too far away from it, for back to dust we must return."

"But not the soul, Halford."

"But the soul dwells in that same dust, right down close to where God made man. When a man rises too far he gets away from the great principles of life, and forgets his neighbor. Indeed, father, I find more simplicity there, more honesty, more passion, more love and emotion, the kind that brings thrills, and more happiness, greater, genuine ideals than on the heights of which you speak. At least for me it has been so."

"Don't construe ignorance and inability to mean honesty, Halford, slovenness for simplicity, sensuality for passion, silly sentiments for love and emotion, mental atrophy for happiness. We were not made to be dormant and if ideals consist of a hovel, a man, a woman and a child always in embrace, without ambition, then the world is going backward."

"Remember that the greatest illuminations of sunset are hugging the rim of the horizon close to the dust you speak of, and I have often found that life doesn't get very far above. Success at the expense of another man is far from being ideal. However, if

you are thinking of Alice, I will marry her if she will have me but there will be no wasted love, no wasted emotions, thrills or sentiments. The time I might be spending in embrace with tuned heart-strings tightly drawn, will be spent for the Chase Manufacturing Company."

"Your marriage with Alice Fairmount will be eminently sane, Halford, eminently suitable. I wish you would arrange it before you go west for your visit to Harvey's."

"As well now as any time, for it is strictly business. I admire Alice, her superior intelligence, her accomplishments, but I have been realising of late that there will never be a thrill in it, never a heart beat gained, never a satisfied longing, never an eager hope allayed, no throbs, no lingering dreams, no song, no sunrises or sunsets, no dreams to touch and send one's blood tingling like fire through the veins as one finds closer to the dust you speak of. Alice will be a part of the business."

"The business needs her just now, Halford. I am glad to hear you talk so sensibly. I started our business years ago, I am the originator of it and for many years I had no sane competition, but the bigger trusts seeing the opportunity want the profits now. I have refused to sell many times. They sent Randolph Fairmount here to compete with me, but my business has grown steadily in spite of them and now I am compelled to triple the stock to enlarge the mills. If they see any way to get a hold they will not fail to do so. Your marriage with Alice will join the two companies, and Randolph Fairmount will let us alone."

"A double wedding, eh? Alice and I and the Chase Manufacturing Company marries the Diamond Mill Company. Which is to be the woman, father?"

A silence and no answer.

"Let it be so. I have decided and perhaps it will be best. Alice will make me a true wife and a good mother for my children." Halford rose from his chair and began to whistle restlessly, pacing the room.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ENGAGEMENT

"Hello, Alice," said Halford, standing in the door with the smile which he had not gotten from his father.

Alice looked up from her book. "Halford!" That exclamation came out of three months of looking across the Atlantic. Halford had no doubt that she had thought of him several times. Her arched brow drew up perceptibly. Yet it was welcome, yes, it was welcome, Halford decided. "You have come back." She rose from her chair and extended a white hand which he took passionately in his. He wanted to take her in his arms and feel her heart beats against his breast, her lips against his, but something in her indifferent manner restrained him. She might cry out and the Chase Manufacturing Company would not get the Diamond Mill Company for a helpmate. Halford dangled his feet as if they were making a severe effort to touch the dust. He held the hand a moment and when he released it, it fell limply to her side.

"I came this afternoon, Alice," said Halford.

"Mamma and papa have gone to see Maude Adams in Peter Pan, but I would not go. I felt I ought to stay here —" She smiled up to him as if in recognition of a compelling influence that runs through life.

"So you really think there is one vibrant cord that connects our hearts, Alice. Has it never told you a more thrilling message; I have sent one to you many times. Didn't you ever get them, Alice?"

Halford watched the clear eyes for a response of answering emotion. She must understand, she knew what he meant but she did not answer.

"Tell me about your trip, Halford."

The man who had come to get an answer to a question turned away thoughtful and his eyes seemed to go across the Atlantic. She was going to make it hard for him to ask that question.

"Europe is crowded, Alice. I could hear and feel them snap together when I stepped out. I could hear the peasantry groan over there, Alice. Up in the Alps was the only place I could breathe. I was really glad to turn my back on the east. I am always going to face the west." There was a moment's silence. "I wonder if I can get you to face the west with me, Alice."

Again she did not answer. "I have always wanted to see that old country. I have pictured it a grand old vista back into history."

"It is grand, it is great. There are magnificent old palaces, and every city and village has its church, filled with those ancient shades, but when one's mind keeps jumping from one of them to a hovel, it tires the mind terribly. The gathering of the peasant's pittance is plain extortion. I wish we could have gone together, Alice, then perhaps we could have turned westward together."

An undisturbed glance met him as she said, "You are not going into the mills then, you are thinking of

going west and start at the bottom?" Her voice sounded an alarm which made him tremble.

"No, Alice, I am giving up my dream of a profession. I am going out into the wilderness where Uncle Peter lives for a short time; then on the first of January I am entering the mills to learn the business from A to W."

The cloud which had gathered on Alice Fairmount's face cleared perceptibly. Sitting across the room facing her, he was watching the waves pass across her features intently, perhaps too intently. "Father says you have a determination of steel, Halford, that when once you have made up your mind nothing could change you or hold you back. He believes you will make a great success. We have been afraid you were going to decide against us, you are so sentimental when it comes to life problems. How did you happen to decide for the mills and give up your dream of the law?"

He made his answer very emphatic by sending it across the room on a glance filled with thrills. "I knew you would want me to, Alice. I believe that was the greatest reason. Perhaps it is easier to follow a blazed trail."

Again her brow arched. "So I am responsible, am I?" She leaned back and watched him with a ripple of laughter.

"I have known you wanted me to all along, and I couldn't give you up, Alice," he said, rising from his chair and going to her.

"Did I ever put it so strong as that. Really, Halford, I wanted to give you a choice. Have I robbed you of it?"

"Now, don't put it that way," he said whimsically and playfully. "We have known each other too long. It isn't a question of robbing each other now, really it isn't, Alice, you know that. With me it has always been from the start a question of shaping our lives so that this day might come." He watched her for a moment but no change came into her face. "Would you want to cling to the first rung of the ladder with me, Alice, for a few years, would you rather?"

She leveled her eyes into his and a smile stole into them.

"Oh, I guess I am glad I made it as strong as I did. Don't talk about getting down into the dust. We might as well start at the top."

She rose from her chair with an air of impatience or contempt and turned to the mantel. Halford went to her; taking her hand in his, drew it up. She did not attempt to draw it away. Searching her profile for a moment he said, "Alice, I knew you would acknowledge it sometime."

"Acknowledge it sometime?" she said quizzically. Her eyes turned to him with arched brow.

"Acknowledge what?" something prevented his lips going to hers.

"Didn't you just say that we might as well start at the top. Alice, don't turn away. Do you want to start with me — will you?" He held her hand tightly in both his own and she made no effort to withdraw it. "I want something, some one to come back to when I go west for two months. I want you to come back to. I couldn't stick to this determination to go into the mills and give up my hope of a

profession without your help. I want to know that you are waiting for me." He spoke with feeling, as if with an effort to add one throb to her heart beats, one thrill to her life. He wanted to feel that he was loved for the man he was and not for the blazed trail he was to follow; he wanted the magnet of human souls to draw her against his breast that he might feel the anxious summons for admittance to his heart; he wanted her lips to betray her soul in "I love you, Halford."

"Alice, you must have known for many years that I wanted you, that this day must come. Haven't you got an answer ready.—What is it, Alice?"

She looked down into the coals that were battling the evening's October chill. Did she want him to lay his heart and soul bare before her or was she teasing him — was she really undecided?

"Why do you hesitate, Alice? Haven't you always known that I was coming to you this way sometime?"

"Yes, Halford, but I was wondering if I ought to rob you of your dream. You think now that you would always want me more than it, perhaps, but youth is fickle. You might blame me sometime, desert me because I had taken it from you. If you should fail —" Her hand trembled in his and something caught in her throat. "You think you are made of steel now. It is youth sustaining you, but if you should come to believe that you were only a willow and that I had bent you — what then?"

She smiled assurance, searching for an answer, a sustaining emotion.

"We may be young, Alice, but we are children no more. My mind is made up, but without you I must give up the mill. I want you to help me with my determination. I want you to help me forget that dream of the law, only you can do it."

"Oh, Halford," she wailed with a calm deliberation, "is it for us alone that you want to give it up or is it to satisfy your imperious father?" Her glance went searchingly up into his.

"You — you, Alice, for you and for me. I don't expect you to get down to the first rung of the ladder and dig in the dirt. I would not ask it of you. Don't you see how you can help me, sustain me? It is our problem, we must work it out together, just you and I."

"Oh, Halford, how could any one refuse you! You are so earnest, so persistent. You couldn't fail at anything. I will be waiting for you when you come back." Her face turned away, perhaps, because she saw that impulse to take her in his arms and rob her lips of all they held. She gently withdrew her hand and went to her chair and sat down.

He went to her. "Alice," he said eagerly, "I want you to be mine the first day I start at the mills — will you? While I am learning the business from A to W I want you to know and to feel that you are a part, the great part of my success."

"But, Halford," she looked up inquiringly, "are you intending to start on a salary, a salary large enough for us? I don't know how to take care of a house as big as this."

Halford looked up puzzled. The bargain had come, the business side of marriage which he had

failed to consider. "We can't have a house as big as this at first, but soon. I don't want you to leave here and wash dishes, and bake and scrub and meet me with welts on your face and hands or we could never solve things. Perhaps we could not have more than two servants at first, but pater will have to stand for two at the very start. I have a little income of my own, not a great deal, but it will help. Let us fix the day for about Christmas. I don't want to go into the mill without knowing that you are mine, always going to be mine."

"You are steel, Halford, father was right."

"Then we shall find a house to-morrow, will you go?"

"Yes, Halford. You really make things so irresistible," she said.

"Everything except my kisses and embrace," thought Halford gravely. For a moment he sat on the massive arm of the chair bending down to the smile that brightened momentarily.

"Guilty or not guilty?" came a voice from the door. Turning, the two lovers saw that Mr. and Mrs. Fairmount had returned from the theater.

A color mounted to Halford's cheeks and he looked with discomfort into the face of Randolph Fairmount. There was no use of him denying his guilt but Alice jumped up. "Guilty, papa," she said in a way that took away more than half the embarrassment.

"Yes," said Halford, "as guilty as kittens caught in the cupboard."

"Well," said Randolph Fairmount, stepping forward with a judicious countenance, "I suppose you

are ready to have sentence pronounced against you. What have you to say for yourselves?"

Side by side the two lovers looked up inquiringly into each other's faces as if to say, as Adam said in the beginning of things, " You tempted me, it's up to you."

" Nothing, eh? " said Randolph Fairmount, seeing the embarrassment of the two. " Well, the legislature of this state has abolished capital punishment so we shall have to pass that. The usual sentence for this kind of offense has been life, but in the present day of advancement it has been greatly reduced, ranging all the way from one day to life."

" Oh, papa, let ours be different! Don't make it just ordinary, let us go back to the old sacred custom of our fathers," said Alice.

" Then I shall make it life."

Then the two greeted Halford and Randolph Fairmount left the room. Her mother smiled up at Halford then followed her husband out of the room.

The two breathed a heavy sigh, then turned with a smile that banished the scene.

" Alice," said Halford, " I have been wondering a long time how I was going to go to your father with this problem. It wasn't bad at all. I rather enjoyed it when the play got started but the raising of the curtain was enough to petrify me. If you hadn't pled guilty just as you did I believe I should have run away. I absolutely forgot my lines. I wonder if things will shape into place like that when we are solving the problems at the mill."

" They shall, Halford."

" Didn't I tell you I needed your help ; if it hadn't been for you the play would have fallen flat, and it would have been execution, slow torture instead of life ! "

## CHAPTER VIII

### DUDE EASTERN

Halford Chase will never forget that trip into the very sunset, with the long line of coaches seeming to plunge into the great ball of fire that illuminated the prairie. The vast waving plain west of Winnipeg racing off to the distant horizon where the eye lingered to pierce the mystery beyond drew the soul into it. Everywhere was interminable distance, brown with autumn frost and try as he may to comprehend it the scene evaded him and held him silent and thoughtful, always trying to look a little farther into the desolation to catch the hidden meaning.

"No more Europes for me," he kept saying to himself. He could not refrain from the comparison. That crowded world pressed against his soul, jostled, hurt and crowded him out. But here the distances tugged at his heart, drew him and he had almost an uncontrollable desire to leap from the speeding train and search the rim of the plain. It held promises, it beckoned with smiling invitation.

Then he came to the mountains, and altitudes and early snows. The bluffs seemed to open up as if to let them in, then the gigantic doors would close softly without a jar. When they had passed through, rivers wended and at times he could not

flatten his nose sufficiently against the window to see the sky-line at the top of the gorges.

"No, Alice would not like this, she wants her world to be crowded, she wants the contact of civilized life, wants to feel its touch always. Her mind would not stand the expansion necessary to understand the desolation, she has no dreams for the silent places, she is out of harmony with nature as God laid it down. Her world must be man-made, her horizon must be clouded with smoke and on a city sky-line. She wants voices which she can readily interpret, not the kind that come from the hidden far-away which mystify, speak strangely and find answer soul to soul.

"No, when Alice and I take our little trip we shall have to go the other way across the waters. She has refused to turn her back on the east with me, we stand back to back and if we should take a step we should be lost to each other, yet I don't want to turn back," his soul was crying in answer to the silent desolation.

The brawny men and the simplicity of the girls and women of the plain added to his appreciation. They were natural and they blended into the color scheme of the west with the frank, open face of the waste.

Halford Chase was the only passenger to alight from the limited at Fish Lake in the heart of the mountains with a valley pointing like an emphatic finger into the very heart of the north, into the silence of the desolation. Stepping to the platform in front of the small squat depot one glance at the scene made his heart expand, swell with exaltation;

a smile came contentedly to his face and lingered; it left a pleasant feeling within. He was glad he had come; he would always remember, but soon, very soon it would be over and he would be back at the mills, shoulder to shoulder with the world instead of soul to soul with it.

The crimson of sunset had already faded into gray, yet the mountains were clear and silent against the sky-line. In his eagerness not to miss the first realization of the waste, he did not see the lonely girl standing on the platform a car's length away who had come to see the first train that had ever crossed her vision. In her wonder, she did not see the one lonely passenger who had alighted.

With a quick glance at the village, with a single street right-angling the track, Halford stepped quickly toward the depot and entered the open door to wait for the depot master. Soon he came in carrying a few packages of express matter.

"Could you tell me if Mr. Harvey, Peter Harvey, has been in town to-day? He must be expecting me on this train," asked Halford. The depot master thought a moment.

"Haven't seen him, don't believe I know him," said the surly agent.

"Didn't you deliver my telegram sent from Winnipeg?" said Halford impatiently.

"I do remember about a telegram," said the agent keeping on with his work. "I left it at the postoffice for him. Don't know whether he has received it or not." And his manner told that he cared even less.

Halford turned away, thoughtful for a moment. "Strange he isn't here. I wrote him over a week

ago." Halford said this half to himself and then picked up his suit-case and stepped toward the door gloomily.

Turning abruptly he asked, "Is there a livery in town?"

"Right up to the end of the street," said the agent, writing at his desk.

Halford turned out of the door sullenly and started up the platform to the sidewalk leading up town. The mountains were fading in the shadows of growing darkness, yet the demarcation between the clear sky and the somber hill-tops seemed more pronounced than in the light of day. He now saw the lonely figure of a girl with her back to him gazing down the track toward the receding express about to crash into the mountainside, which with a quick turn entered a gorge and was gone. Still the girl gazed at the spot where it had vanished. He drew near her. She must have heard his steps for she turned quickly and met his gaze squarely. Halford's smile had come back; he forgot that Peter Harvey was not at the depot to meet him. He came near stopping to greet her, so fittingly did she harmonize with his mood. He looked down into eyes that seemed to illuminate the fading twilight with another day. They were eyes that spoke sadly, appealingly, and he was compelled to watch them in obedience to the thrill that went over him.

"Now I know where the sunset has gone," he was saying to himself. He did not see the wolf-skin cap that was drawn half way over her forehead, the heavy mackinaw coat or the short heavy woolen skirt that met the tops of the heavy lace tan shoes. It would

have made no difference, for one dark cloud cannot detract from a sunset, if it does not, in fact, even add to its splendor.

Halford knew her stare was not one of boldness for it made a quick pulse within him, a thrill which went through him like an electric shock. No, she was not brazen, just hopeful, frank, honest, wistful and compelling.

"Halford, Halford, I knew you would come on my first train, the very first I have ever seen. How could I help it because I didn't have to stick a nose and ears and a chin on my picture with pine pitch any old way, just to get it finished so it wouldn't have a scar. Halford, does it make any difference because I wouldn't let Freddy kiss me that day on the road when I wanted to save them all for you? They ain't very much to give but will you take them sometime? I was going to put the color of the cheeks and of the hair on my picture that day at Harvey's but now it's all finished, Halford."

He had now passed her, but still her heart was speaking.

"Oh, Halford, you are going without taking them." In the ecstasy of suddenly meeting her picture face to face, she had half expected him to stop and speak her name.

So the mate called out of the wilderness, out of the desolation, out of the snow of the north and the answer that came as he was walking up the street was this.

"Gad, but she is pretty, got that Nile sunset girl beaten, and I came near stealing her kisses that day

across the pond. She is the sunset and the sun besides."

"Halford, have you been making pictures, too?" was what she found in his face.

Up the street he turned for another glance and she was still standing as he had left her, but no more did she watch up the converging rails to see that vanishing dream of the train slipping into the gorge of the mountain two miles away.

Halford Chase, in his hurry to reach Pete Harvey's ranch that night, dismissed the girl from his mind and passing the post-office, two general stores with hitching racks in front, a meat market, a bank and a confectionery store, he came to the livery stable and turned quickly in.

"I wish to get a team and driver as soon as I can get my dinner," said Halford to the pleasant-looking, though roughly clad westerner who met him at the door of the grimy office.

"Dinner!" exclaimed Steve with a smile. "We will have them all ready for you. Drive around to the hotel for you, eh?" said Steve with a quick glance down and then up the stranger.

"Just as well," said Halford turning, "and say, I will leave my suit-case with you so you can have it tucked away under the seat."

"All right, stranger," said Steve; "be all ready for you in half an hour."

Halford turned back down the street with a quick glance to the valley looking to the north pointing into the night. The mountains were somber and black. A chilly breeze hit him in the face but its

freshness was invigorating and he liked it after the long ride in the over-heated sleeper. The face of the girl came back and he wished he might meet her again. He glanced up the street before turning into the hotel but could see no one. "I wonder if they are all sunset girls out here with a sun in them."

After supper Halford stepped out to find that the livery was standing in front of the door. The young man made room in the seat and as Halford stepped quickly to the buggy asked, "Where to?"

"I wish to go out to Peter Harvey's ranch. I suppose I might have waited until morning but they will be expecting me to-night. I wrote them some time ago of my coming. Something has prevented their coming into town for me."

The span of bays were already in a trot and the driver, a lad of about sixteen, drew up with a stiff rein and a loud whoa, and turned to the stranger with evident contempt. Looking up and down Halford's faultless apparel he said, "You damn fool, where you from anyhow?"

Halford drew up. "What's that?"

The humor of the situation now came to the driver and he smiled in apology. "W'y, Pete Harvey's ranch is two hundred miles from here and the road ain't fit for a pack animal half the way." He took out his whip and turned into the stable again, nearly upsetting the buggy as he made the turn. Halford's offended brain was still contemplating the challenge of being called a "damn fool."

"Aw, stranger don't mind about what I said," said the driver half with humor, half with disgust; "that's friendly out here. I kind o' liked the way

you smiled or I wouldn't 'a' said it. Ain't onto this climate, be you?"

Halford acknowledged that he was not, but he accepted the friendly apology. The humor of the circumstance now came and he laughed heartily. "You say it's two hundred miles to Harvey's place?"

"Way up in the Chilco country. Right up this valley running up north. Better change your mind about going out to-night. I would. Takes between ten and fifteen days with a pack outfit. One went out this morning."

The lad was busily unhitching the team. There was no way for him to get to Harvey's. He knew nothing about trails, pack outfits or guides. He must go back on the morning train. "Guess I'll take your advice, young man. How much do I owe you for the ride?"

"One dollar for that ride, mister," said the lad, leading his horses to a stall and pulling off the harness.

"Say," said the lad as Halford turned away, "if you want to go up to Harvey's place there is a neighbor of his'n down for a winter's grub-stake, flour and things. She'll let you go along, I guess."

"She! You mean a woman does the packing?"

"Hardly. She's about sixteen and as pretty as a flower."

"Think she would want a fellow to travel with her?" asked Halford, "without a chaperon."

"Without what?"

"Another woman, her mother, some older person being along."

"Guess she can take care of herself, stranger,

guess she can. A gal that can pack a cayuse and throw the diamond hitch can take care of herself."

"Why did her father send her down alone. Isn't it hard for a girl so young?" asked Halford sympathetically.

"Pretty tough, mister, I'm thinkin', but it ain't none of my business. She ain't Jim Langborn's kid nohow or he wouldn't a-done it. Nobody knows why he makes a nigger out of her, but maybe you will find out if you go up with her," said the driver, finishing his work for the night and stepping to the door.

With his suit-case Halford turned toward the hotel. "I suppose she is stopping at the hotel. If I make up my mind to go up I can see her there no doubt."

"My, no. Jim Langborn wouldn't give her the money to stop at no hotel. I bet she ain't got a cent. She'll quit Jim sometime if I'm any judge, quit him cold. She's sharp as a pin. She's got no place else to go they say, but she'll hand Jim Langborn a bunch that he'll remember—sure." He hesitated a moment, then added. "She'll be getting her supplies down at Thompson's. They can tell you where to find her. And say, stranger, let me give you a tip."

Halford turned.

"Don't get fresh just because you come from the East. She's great, could shoot the taste out of your mouth and you would never know it, if it wasn't for the smell of burnt powder. So long, stranger." And the lad turned up the street.

"Thanks," said Halford as he turned toward the hotel. Seeing a light in Thompson's general store

he turned in. Halford stepped up to the man across the counter and extended his hand with a greeting; and his usual smile, which had won him friends in the past, brought a welcome from the sober Thompson.

"I am thinking of going up into the Chilco country and I understand there is a girl down from Jim Langborn's who might show me the way. I am going to Peter Harvey's. Could you tell me where I might find her?" asked Halford.

"Yes," said Thompson, looking strangely up from the counter. "It's hell a man would send a girl like her down for grub the way Jim Langborn has. I came near not letting her have the stuff. Jim Langborn ain't no man or he wouldn't have done it. It's a man's job and she's only sixteen." Thompson looked dreamily up the counter. "Yes, she was in this afternoon and made arrangements for the grub. She's camped across the lake about a mile from town," said Thompson condemningly.

"Alone?" questioned Halford.

"Yes, alone. She will likely not go out for a couple of days yet. Follow the lake around to the right. There's a trail. Most all the outfits from the north stop there for pasture for their horses."

There was a moment's silence. "Thank you," said Halford, extending his hand again. "You are Thompson?" That affable westerner nodded. "My name is Chase, Halford Chase. Peter Harvey is my uncle. If I conclude to go up I can help the girl on her way."

"Sure could, Mr. Chase. For the girl's sake I hope you conclude to go."

Halford turned out of the store wondering if by any chance this girl could be the "sunset girl" he had met at the depot. She was there alone. Once he felt an impulse to go across the lake and see about that trip to Harvey's and bring her back with him. But feeling that such an invitation from him, a stranger, would be misconstrued he turned toward the hotel. He sympathized with her, whoever she might be.

As Halford Chase turned into the hotel door a voice arrested him.

"That's a dude Eastern," said the voice in the night, and turning quickly he saw two dim figures going down the street.

## CHAPTER IX

### LITTLE SUNSET

The clock had struck seven when Halford stepped out of the hotel lobby into the fresh morning breeze coming down the valley from the snow-capped peaks glistening in the far-away north. It was a morning to bring a thrill of delight. The mountains stood out clear and distinct no matter how far away they were set against the sky-line. He took several deep breaths and after filling his lungs with the nectar of western ozone, started across the street to find the trail of which Thompson had told him.

The mountain to the west was as clear as if it were set only ten feet away and the top was bathed in gold with the rising sun, glistening clear between the deep blue of the sky and the gray of the shadow beneath the line of gold. The north wind hit the side of his cheek with cool, exhilarating freshness. The very newness of the scene, the very majesty of the mountains, their rawness stimulated every fiber of the Easterner.

"It's great," he caught himself saying time after time. A few trees were scattered over the mountain to the west and on the bunch-grass slope across the lake at the foot of the mountain he heard the clear tinkle of a bell.

Finding his way through the sage and grease-wood

over a low rolling hill, Halford came to a view of Fish Lake silent and clear under the reflection of the sky, unruffled by the breeze that went high over its surface. Bordering the lake were a few clumps of willows and higher up the slope were a few scattered aspen, then the grease-wood higher still, in which he stood. Here and there was a scrubby pine or fir guarding like sentinels over the waste. Ringing the lake at a glance, he saw a white tepee tent close to the opposite shore. Other than this and the tinkle of the bell on the hillside there was no evidence of life. Passing over the ridge he stopped and looked back but the town was hidden from view. He was in the silence, the kind of silence that speaks to an answering soul.

He soon came to a trail which led to the shore of the lake, and soon a second trail wended him about through the chaparral to the right. This must be the one of which Thompson had spoken. He hurried on with an occasional glance toward the tepee tent across the water. Now he could see a blue film of smoke rising from the ground in front of the tent, a camp fire doubtless. He soon saw some one coming down the hill from the direction where the bell still tinkled in the bunch-grass among the scattered pines. When the figure reached the tent he saw a second figure, a man, step into the open at the side of the tepee.

Thompson had said she was alone. He thought of the sunset girl at the depot and a slight revulsion went swiftly through Halford and he turned to watch the trail. When he reached the end of the lake, the tent stood between him and the two voices

he could hear, but he could not understand what was being said. The man was doing most of the talking and his voice had a threatening ring that Halford did not like.

Stepping aside from the tent he saw the face of the girl he had met at the depot watching the train vanish into the mountain. She was looking away from the man across the lake with an intent gaze whimsically confident and asserting. To the man before her who was seated on a log she turned an occasional glance of unconcern. She was listening to what the man was saying with vibrations of co-mingling apprehension and humor. He wore the conventional, broad-brimmed hat of the West, with a woolen shirt, and a six-shooter was hanging at his side.

"No, Freddy, I won't, I am saving them all for the picture." Her keen, dancing eyes watched Freddy expectantly as if prepared for defense.

The man addressed as Freddy sprang to his feet and clasped her right hand in his before she could reach for her own six-shooter at her side. Anger, contempt, hatred went over her face and a flash went up to Freddy as she drew back. There was a semblance of pain, for his grasp was wrenching her wrist.

"If he ever kisses you I will kill him," Freddy was saying.

Realizing that he was champion of a most unpleasant scene judging from the manner of the girl, Halford stepped forward. Her face turned up and he caught the girl's pleading eye. The sunset reddened perceptibly, yet it was more imploring than

before. It was certainly disconcerting to have one's picture enter at such a moment.

"Haven't you carried the joke about far enough?" said Halford in his usual calm manner, which had the steel of five generations in it.

Freddy turned upon him with a quick clasp on his six-shooter. He did not draw it, however, but watched the intruder contemptuously. The scar was menacing, clear; the eyes were threatening and a curse hissed from the set lips. He had evidently been taken by surprise and to be thwarted in a purpose was an open affront according to Freddy's code.

Halford stood silent for a moment, smiling.

"However, it is for her to say if I or you shall go," said Halford in the same confident tones. He waited for the girl to speak as if ready to depart upon her request.

"I wish you would stay, Halford." Yes, her voice was trembling. Halford's face broadened into a contented smile. It was as if she had known him always and was pleading for his protection. The easy way she spoke, her knowing his name was acceptable flattery. The greatness, the simplicity and the innocence of the desolation was in her very being, the roughness of it conspicuously absent.

Freddy turned away sullenly. "I will remember this, Dude Eastern," Freddy flared.

Still Halford smiled with a step forward, but nothing was threatening in his easy grace. "I have no doubt you will. I would, if I were you."

To the man with the gun on his hip this was open challenge. "We will settle this, when we meet again and there is no lady to interfere with a man's right

to settle in his own way. We will settle in my way," said Freddy.

"I would take you for a man who would settle in no other way. Your conduct to-day convinces me of that." The fearless don't-care way of this uninitiated man from the East made the girl apprehensive. She must end the controversy which must, at least, be unpleasant for the man who had saved her from insult.

"Trot along, Freddy. You are such a reckless shot and I don't want to see you hurt right in my own camp," she said.

Freddy's face was pulsing angrily. Gods, what a veritable little fool she was. Halford's heart swelled with pride for her. Never before had he seen a girl who would dare offer open challenge to a man of Freddy's type. However, the man with the scar took his hand from the butt of his gun and walked down the trail toward the lake.

Halford turned to the girl who had seated herself on the log from which Freddy had gotten up so quickly. Tears were about to flow out to wash away the color of the sunset.

"Did he hurt your wrist?" he asked.

"Only for a minute. It's all right now, sure it is. Freddy understands. It will be you instead of me that is in danger now." Why should she not be concerned for the safety of her picture?

"Is Freddy the kind of man he appears to be? That scar looks like a bullet wound. I wonder if the other man got off as lucky." Still he watched her face.

"He is a notch on Freddy's gun," said the girl,

turning the sunset up to him. It was more dazzling than he had at first thought, or was it because she permitted a deeper glance into it now that he had championed her cause. The effect upon him was of a privilege never before bestowed.

"I suppose I shall be the second."

"The sixth," she said apprehensively, just as if her voice came out of a real sunset, soft, low but ever changing in its baffling brilliancy.

"And he so young. Isn't he ever going to quit?" asked Halford whimsically. She was visibly concerned, for the threat Freddy had made would be remembered.

"You had his word for it to-day and Freddy is a man of his word when the right to make notches on his gun are concerned. You seem to take it as a joke, but you had best keep out of Freddy's way." There was appeal in her face and her lips were no longer trembling for her own welfare.

"Or stay with you. That was what he said, wasn't it,—when there was no lady to interfere. Think of being my protector, of my being unable ever to leave your side for fear of Freddy." She was beginning to wonder if it would be safe to give up the picture for the man who inspired it.

"I am sure I shall never look him up if he will only leave me alone—"

"But he won't, he meant it, don't you understand? Can you shoot, Halford?" "Why did she care if he met Freddy?" Halford was asking himself.

"I don't even carry a gun. Do you think he would shoot me down without giving me a chance?"

"Didn't he say it must be settled in his way?

None in the least, Halford." Her eyes went down contemplatively. Was she studying a plan for his safety while he had been smiling into the black muzzle of Freddy's gun.

"I don't like to hear you calling me by my name when I don't know yours," he said. "I suppose you got mine from Peter Harvey."

"Arda," she said with a quick glance upward.

"Arda Sunset," he added without hesitation. It came as natural as if he had known her always and they had met after a short separation. "You were standing on the platform last night when I got off the train," he said, dismissing Freddy from his mind. He sat down where he could watch her face. He had been missing real sunsets all his life and he must make up for twenty-two years. He looked at the tent, the camp-fire, and listened to the tinkle of the bell on the hill. Just where he had always expected to find a sunset. How in keeping with the ideal his father had accused him of. No, it was just sympathy for her. Halford was telling himself.

"Yes, you came on my first train," she acknowledged in deference to the picture.

Under the wolf-skin fur he saw a wave of passion, which was almost exaltation. Freddy had gone over the hill toward town, for Halford had watched him purposefully. No sound disturbed the silence save the tinkle of the bell on the hill.

"Yes, I am going with you, Arda Sunset, up to Peter Harvey's," he was saying to himself. He was sure that it was purely a question of scenery, the novelty of a two weeks' ride over a mountain trail that was inducing him to make the trip to Harvey's.

When he spoke aloud he was looking far beyond the sunset into a heart dreaming.

"They told me over town that by chance I might go up to Peter Harvey's with you. I thought at first when I learned how far it was —"

"Two hundred miles," she said.

"Yes. I thought I would return home but I have decided to make the trip, if I may go along and help you with the packs."

"You mean that you are going to Chilco." He did not know that she was suppressing the greatest exaltation of her life. It overwhelmed her, she could not realize that he had asked to go over the long trail with her.

"Yes," she heard a voice somewhere.

"Halford, O, Halford," her heart was saying wildly, crying to the picture. "I shall have you for fifteen days. You won't ever go away, then!"

"I can come back — the snow will not close the trail before I will have a chance to get away. I must be home before Christmas," he was saying when she returned to earth again.

"No, no, the trails never close, Halford. You shall go to Harvey's and I shall be your guide." She was fighting back every doubt. "You wish to come back before the snows come. Yes, you will have plenty of time, plenty of time." She could not tell him different, she could not drive him back now that he had come. The trail would be so short, only a moment, until he would be gone. "No, the snow will not come before you can come back." The train that had brought him would take him away again. Oh, if all the trains in the world could only be

wrecked, she never wanted to see another. They had answered their purpose, they had brought him. There was no more use for trains, they were too rapid, they would take her picture away and she could never see him again. She had worked tirelessly so long to paint it and now she was about to lose it just as she had always known she would. He was rich and proud, it would be just a moment, a taunting glance from him and then she would be left to dream alone.

Soon she got up from the log and threw a few twigs on the fire. Every movement was made with deliberation, and a sort of primitive grace that pleased him.

"Got a horse, Halford?" she asked to pursue the thought along the trail to Harvey's.

"No, Miss Sunset. I want you to advise me just what I ought to get for the trip. I am going up to Harvey's to hunt for a couple of weeks. I have been wanting a trip like this for a long time and this is likely to be my last chance. It may be that I shall never see the West again." Alice compelled that thought.

"Never, Halford, don't you like my country?"

"I love it, Miss Sunset, but you see my life has been made to order, so it's got to fit. I wish I could stay for a long time, but there are things which make it necessary for me to be home at Christmas time."

She stood before the crackling twig fire and turned to him with a far-away smile.

"First, you want to get some clothes. Them would be spoilt before you went half-way. Then you want a horse. Steve can pick one up for you—he is the man in the stable. Then you want a saddle,

a gun like mine,"— she drew her own forty-five — "in case you should meet Freddy. If you are going to hunt you want a rifle. Those shoes you got wouldn't stand a mountain dew a day. You can get along without the chaps. Get a mackinaw coat like mine, only a man's. I'll go over town and see you get fit out right. It'll cost something, but —"

"It will be worth it, just to ride with a sunset all day long," he interrupted.

He was watching the profile of her vibrating face and wished she might turn to him.

"You have got the money for all them things, Halford?" she said in fear that she was making it impossible for him to go.

"Guess we can cut it," said Halford dropping into her mode of speech which came so easily and yet impressively. For an hour they planned the trip. She told of Pete Harvey's and Sammie and Dorothy, but not a word of Jim Langborn. Halford was too considerate of her sensitiveness as yet to speak of the mission, the hardships of the trail with packs.

"Then we shall go over town," she said. "I want to start day after tomorrow." They started down the trail. "We shall row across the lake. I usually go that way and sometimes I get a fish for dinner on my way back."

This brought to mind the fact that she was staying here alone. The encounter with Freddy convinced Halford Chase that it was unsafe for a girl so young to remain here. They were to be companions on a long journey. He was planning for her. He could not have his sunset blotted out, erased from the horizon into which he had dreamed with hopeful

gaze. By some means foul or fair he must get her to accept a favor of him in return for being his guide to Harvey's.

They were soon at the shore and she dropped down in the canoe and took up the paddle.

"Now, look here, Little Sunset, if we are going to be friends you must get into the other end of the boat where I can keep an eye on you." She went to the bow and sat down with a quaint turn of her head.

They were some distance from the shore when he said, "Remember, Little Sunset, you are going to have dinner with me at the hotel to-day and supper also, and if you say you can have a room there instead of staying here alone."

"Guess not, Mr. Eastern," she said. A flash went up into the sunset and it was a repulse. The paddle waves went out to the shore. He knew she would misunderstand. He was too abrupt. Still he planned, still he was determined that she should not remain at the camp where Freddy might come again to annoy her.

## CHAPTER X

### HALFORD WINS A POINT

"You see, Halford, as long as I am with you Freddy will respect your right to live," said Arda, as she jumped out of the canoe and pulled the bow upon the shore.

"So you are to be my protector, that is why you came over with me, is it? What am I to do when you go back to your lonely camp?" he asked seriously.

"You see," she went on without answering his inquiry, "had you not provoked him with that smile, you would have been safe enough—"

"Until I kissed you."

"Yes." A deeper crimson went over the sunset and shot to the very dome of the universe. "You heard him say that?"

He put down his paddle and jumped out to the shore beside her.

"I did." An inquiry went into his smile. "Did he actually refer to me when he said that or was he, in his jealousy, referring to the man who did kiss you?"

"Perhaps Freddy could tell you." She looked straight ahead and he turned. Only her profile held that dauntless mask that had so pleased him on the depot platform and since. No, it was not bold-

ness, rather was it simplicity and innocence of the kind which comes of a confident humor which says, "I know where to draw the line and you shall never dare to cross it without my consent." Evidently the Grundy woman was altogether too fastidious to dwell in Arda's north and had left a more obliging chaperon on the rim of the sunset; one, perhaps, as exacting, but less somber, sober and finical with over-rated dignity.

"W'y, you just told me that I must never meet Freddy again. Now you wish me to ask him a very troublesome question. But I remember. Freddy said, 'If he ever kisses you I will kill him,' and now you say I was the 'he!'" Halford laughed and then continued, "Freddy was very bold in his opinion of me when he presumed I would kiss you while he was looking on. Really, I have half a notion to see if Freddy meant to do what he said." Still it was the rim, the very edge of the sunset with the vibrations of humor in it which he saw.

"You would want to justify Freddy's opinion of you, would you, Halford?"

"It might be worth the chance. You see I have never seen a real sunset before, except one—"

"And you kissed her and gave nothing in return," accused Arda.

"Perhaps I might, had the mother not been watching," said Halford. He laughed, but Arda was less elated. She had saved something always for her picture and now he was finding humor in it where seriousness was more fitting. Halford Chase fancied that he could understand when he had trespassed on sacred rights. He believed he understood

her failure to laugh with him. Swiftly his mind went over those few words between Freddy and the girl before he made an enemy. She was saying, "I am keeping them all for the picture." Perhaps the wilderness, the snow and the dreams they brought had born a sentiment of which a man might well be proud. Would she have kept her word and killed Freddy had he taken one, the very first one, she had saved on the trembling lips.

"Just like Freddy might have done, had you not come along when you did. Where is your scar, Halford? Freddy's got his where you can see it."

Another one of his glances went down to her profile, but the caprice had ceased to vibrate. Evidently the stealing of kisses was not a joke. He had never supposed that a wild little sunset girl could hurt him but the comparison with Freddy cut along the sensitive lining of his heart. What would his father say if he knew that he was being wounded by another of those fanciful Nile sunsets, and one that had a sun in it. How he would jerk the paternal string which he had noosed about his neck. Halford went on the stubborn theory that steel would not erode and that the fire of passion would never take the temper out of it. "Yes, he was safe enough."

"Well, Little Sunset, it's certain that it is going to be my smile that compels Freddy to kill me. You shall have nothing to do with it in the least. If I can't get you to stay at the village and accompany me to dinner, he might come upon me right in the hotel and then I couldn't buy the gun and the mackinaw and the big shoes and the horse and the saddle and you would not get my help going back to Chilco.

But it would be too bad to rob Freddy of so much amusement, wouldn't it, even to save me, and to think that extra notch on his gun might be the ambition of his life."

"It is."

"You are sure of it. Perhaps he has no Easterner among those notches. Think of the triumph, the novelty of it. Just like a cannibal getting an American missionary, when his diet has been English all his life."

"You seem to take Freddy's threat as a joke, or don't you care?" The edge of the sunset turned. Every movement brought added brilliancy.

"And you don't care either, or you would accept my invitation to go to dinner with me."

"Perhaps I might," came shyly.

"You wouldn't want him to get me at supper time either, would you, Little Sunset?"

"No, but the sun always sets on the hill for me. I must go back to the tepee tent to-night," she said divining to where he was leading and the thought that she might accept so much from him wounded her sensitive pride.

"Now, look here, Little Sunset. Back where I live the sun always sets on the tops of the buildings then goes right down into them as a nymph sinks into the sea at dawn. Just because Jim Langborn sends you down here to do a man's job and makes you sleep out there on the lonely hill, it's no sign there are no men in the world. Freddy might go over there again when I was not around and you could not save them all for —'him.' "

Her eyes went up to his searchingly. They

scanned every line that cut that uneroded steel which had been tempered in the furnace of fortune.

"I am not going to let you go back there," Halford continued. "I mean to speak to the landlord about your having a room where it isn't chilly and hard and lonely and where there are no Freddys. If you don't accept it, then I can't accept your offer to show me the way to Chilco where Peter Harvey lives." He was emphatic, determined, she saw the clank of steel in him, it rang. Already had she planned that ride to Chilco with him in the trail, goading Croppy with a pointed stick for being so lazy. She could not give it up, yet she made no answer.

"Where is the sun going to set to-night, Little Sunset; on the house-tops and sink down through the roof, or on the mountain-top and be lost in the cold ground?" Still she was searching his face for motive.

"Do you really want to go up to Chilco very much? I would show you the way, anyhow."

"I want to go to Chilco. If you think I am so heartless as to let you lie out there on the hill when there is a nice warm room at the hotel to keep you warm, you better not take me along. It wouldn't be safe."

She smiled. "Maybe I will, Halford, but you could a-gone anyhow." How determined she was not to admit a voluntary acceptance of the favor.

By what process of engrossing mentality over physical restraint, neither knew, but they found that they were silently standing in the pathway facing each other, sunset reflecting the steel armour of his perverted soul.

Arda was hurrying up the trail when he turned.  
"Little Sunset," he implored, "don't be so fast. Suppose Freddy should come along and find you ten feet away from me, I would only be a notch on his gun." But she did not stop. "I have no idea what distance he would permit you to get away before the line of a lady's interference had been drawn." He hurried on and walked at her side to the top of the hill. She did not turn to him as they went.

"Listen to that, Little Sunset, the landlord is shaking his brass knuckles to warn us to dinner. We shall have to wait until Thompson unlocks his store again, before we can get the uniform."

Now on the crest of the rounded hill they went down to the hotel together. There was something within Halford, beating on that soul of steel. Perhaps sometime it might crystallize and crumble like a car axle, and then the Chase Manufacturing Company would have no support to turn upon.

"Thompson, about this heavy woolen underwear," Halford was saying, "it will stab every inch of me." His tone was critical, complaining.

"Just the thing for the cold, Mr. Chase, it toughens the skin." Thompson was sure of it.

"If I'm going to have a choice of the kind of an animal I am going to be, I don't want to be a rhinoceros. My skin is tough enough and thick enough, and it is my skin, Thompson."

"In three days it will feel like kitten fur, Mr. Chase. Guarantee it," assured Thompson.

Halford took it. "Now, Mr. Thompson, we must consult Little Sunset about the guns." Halford turned to call to her. "Just think of some lucky

devil having sunset every day, all his lucky life. The sky isn't half big enough for the illumination. I have a good notion to stay chapped and mackinawed and pricked with this woven wire suit of underwear the rest of my days," Halford was saying as he saw her at the rear of the store.

" You have got it, Mr. Chase, she's just a sunset. I don't blame you for wanting to get your head up into it for a time, Mr. Chase," said Thompson, as Arda drew up.

" You said a .45 six-shooter and a 30-30 rifle, didn't you, Arda? " asked Halford as she looked up in answer to his summons.

" Yes."

" And cartridges. Arda, have you plenty for your gun? " asked Halford.

" Three besides the ones in my gun." He looked at her incredulously.

" Not enough to make the smell of burnt powder in a bear's face. Give us five hundred, Thompson, and two hundred for the rifle. The bear might come in flocks, you know."

The outfit was complete and Arda's eager, wistful eyes were resting on a pair of Indian-made gloves handsomely decorated with colored beads. It would take many things to satisfy the ardor of that gaze, Halford knew.

" Will you step back here a moment, Thompson," said Halford, going down the isle. The owner stepped back to the rear of the crowded store room.

" She wants that pair of gloves, Thompson. She hasn't even mittens and the mornings are chilly. How much are they? "

"Six dollars, and they are cheap at that. Beauties, aren't they? Give a squaw five and a half for them not a week ago."

"Here is your money. Give them to her. No, she wouldn't take them from me. She has got a kind of moral code that's different; crowds everything else out. Sensitive. Loves some chap and doesn't want to desecrate the memory of him."

When the two went back where she stood her eyes were racing up and down the shelving but often they rested momentarily on the gloves in a way to conceal her wistfulness.

"Lookin' at them gloves?" asked Thompson easily, out of deference to Halford's request.

"Pretty, ain't they," she said with a flush. Thompson took them down and placed them on the counter before her. Arda did not take them in her hands but started to turn away as if by a repulse.

"Got quite a bill of goods this time, Arda," said Thompson. "I will make you a present of them in return."

Turning quickly she caught Thompson's glance at Halford. He handed them to her reluctant yet eager hands. She turned out of the door and Halford followed. A glint of mist was in her eyes.

"Generous fellow, Thompson, after all. Appreciates one's business," said Halford.

She stopped with offense. "You bought them, Halford; take them, won't you?" They were stretched out to him. "I couldn't refuse to take them before Thompson. He would think." The gloves fell from her hands and they went to her face. She sobbed convulsively. "Would think I was

daffy over you." Halford picked up the beaded gloves and watched her a moment, mystified.

"Look here, Little Sunset, don't make a rain storm, a salt air mist out of this. It wouldn't be an unpardonable offense if you did like me a little. I'd be proud to have a sunset girl like you love me a heap."

Already Halford found that the primitive language of this girl was creeping into his vocabulary. He thrust the gloves into her hands covering her face. A hot tear dropped on his hand and it burned there for many minutes.

## CHAPTER XI

### FREDDY'S WAY

It was seven when Halford arose the next morning donning his western trail clothes. He went into the office looking for Arda to go down to breakfast. He searched every place about the hotel then went outside to look down the street but she was nowhere to be found. Going back to the office the landlord surveyed him in surprise.

"Ready for the trail, be you, Mr. Chase. Your guide went across the lake over an hour ago."

"The sensitive little fool," he thought as he recalled that his invitation did not include breakfast. "There's something about her I just don't understand. She ought to have known I meant her to stay here until we hit the long trail," he deliberated. Her face flushed before him. The eyes as deep as the sky with every curtain drawn back that he might see into her soul, straying to his, were always the same. The simplicity, the unobstructed blue was almost a plea, an imploring, innocent claim for life. Standing thoughtful for a moment Halford hurried out of the door and went over the hill and down the trail leading to the lake. He could hear the tinkle of Croppy's bell and soon he saw a figure on the opposite shore pushing off the canoe. A few feet from

the bank and as far from the trail, he sat down on a log in the chaparral and waited for her. As on the former morning the lake was a ripple, a calm to make the sky dance on the smooth surface of the water.

Soon he heard her voice coming across the lake. It was clear, every note perfect, and it was filled with a sad melody of song. It went deeper into him than any voice he had ever heard and it seemed to pound on the heart of steel as if to batter it down. He listened, watching the diverging V on the water extending from the stern of the dug-out canoe. Soon the song broke upon his ear.

“ Oh, 'tis a maiden's love for a mate  
That guides me, glides me over the lake,  
Out of the west;  
Oh, 'tis the cry of a heart that is sighing,  
Now 'tis the hope of one that is flying,  
Seeking a mate.”

A smile of contentment was on Halford's face as she drew up to the shore. She did not see him. The Indian-beaded gloves were on her hands and her face was turned proudly up to the morning breeze like a wind blowing into the sunset. In lower tones, but as clear, she was singing the song over and over again. With a quick grace as agile as a fawn's, she sprang to the bank and pulled the bow of the canoe upon the shore. For a moment she stood looking at the dawn rising out of the east, with rapid growing brilliancy as if to gather it into her face for a morning toilet. Finally she turned and drew the gloves from her hands, looked them over with delight, a smile cutting every line of the proud, young face. In a

thrill of ecstasy the gloves went momentarily to her lips. Looking up they went quickly behind her with an "Oh!" as she saw Halford on the log watching her with an appreciative smile.

When he arose from the log another, "Oh!" Her eyes widened with surprise and delight. He stepped forward, out of the chaparral.

"You like my outfit?" He stood before her as if on exhibition, mackinaw, chaps and all.

"You look bigger, Halford, and better." It was true, to Arda at least, that he had descended to her world. He seemed so far away in city clothes and he could not fail to notice how bright her eyes were as if he had drawn very close to her; as if to meet her lips. Just as a deer is more beautiful in the forest than in a park, so was Halford in the western garb, it seemed to her.

"And the sunset has brightened this morning," he said. "I feel just like an armored cruiser with the deck cleared for battle." He drew back his mackinaw to show the six-shooter at his side. "If I could get a few of your tresses for the sights of my cannon I could hit the target at five miles every shot. Freddy can't get me now with this armor." He wrapped the heavy mackinaw about him.

"Is it that or the steel of your heart that gives you a confidence of safety?"

He stared at her incredulously. So she had discovered his steel-tempered heart, the one that got him engaged to Alice Fairmount; the one that was soon to take him into the mills and away from the law, of which he had hoped so long.

"Perhaps it is because you have come that I have

no fear of Freddy," he said stepping to the trail.  
"Now, Little Sunset, why did you run away this morning, so that I could have no breakfast?"

"I came to the ridge and could not hear Croppy's bell, so I went across the lake to see if the horses had left us," she said, putting the gloves into her pockets stealthily.

"I hear the bell on the hill —"

"Yes, Croppy was resting. He is the early bird of the flock and gets his fill before the others even get their legs limbered. That is why I put the bell on Croppy, they follow him wherever he goes."

"And incidentally you got your breakfast over a camp-fire, didn't you?"

Her eyes went down. "You didn't ask me —"

"Silly Little Sunset." It was always at just such moments that she refused to let him look into her eyes. Some simple little player always got out on the stage at the very critical moment to spoil the performance. She ought to have trained him differently, when she knew he was in the audience.

"We start on the trail tomorrow morning at dawn, Halford," she said.

Ready for the trail except for the packing of the ponies which would take an hour in the morning. Arda decided to take Halford's bay to the camp and introduce her to the outfit. It was three in the afternoon. The new saddle securely cinched, she rode to the tepee and hobbling the bay turned her loose with the other horses. As she was to stay at the hotel that night, she took down the tent and packed everything ready for the trail. The bay soon made

friends with her horses and was cropping contentedly on the bunch-grass hill when Arda turned from the hillside toward the village. Entering the trail she walked a short distance around the shore and sat down on a log close to a clump of willows to watch the after-glow of sunset. The crimson had changed to amber, then to gold, to gray with a rising breeze when she heard a whistle. It was Halford. He was coming to meet her and the tune was an imitation of the song she had sung that morning when he was waiting for her at the shore. Her heart throbbed, her breast swelled, a tear glistened on her eyelid and dropped to her cheek. He had sought her each time she had left the village — he was coming again. What was it that brought him? Something grew in her breast. She wiped the tear from her cheek, concealed herself by the trail to surprise him when he came, and waited for his approach.

Now he stopped and turned to the dimming skyline in the west. Soon a second figure came over the crest of the ridge and made his way toward Halford. It was Freddy, creeping through the chaparral toward the trail where Halford stood. She could see Freddy's face, hopeful, eager, and revengeful. A rim of white went around Arda's eyes. She was intent, her muscles grew tense with fear. Creeping to a fallen tree she crouched down and waited. Halford was still watching the gauze of the western rim; perhaps, he was searching the opposite shore for her, unsuspecting, wondering where the tepee had gone. Freddy made his way silently and rose up out of the greasewood and drew his gun. It raised with deliberation and caution. He had just brought the

gun to a level with his eye when Arda fired. Every notch on Freddy's gun was blown into atoms and a hole was through his hand. He dropped into the greasewood and sneaked up the hill away from town. Halford turned quickly and then ran up the trail and vanished over the ridge. When both men were out of view Arda sprang from her hiding-place to the trail and ran as fast as her nimble legs would take her and entered the village out of breath. Her heart was beating with great throbs against her breast. The incident made her tremble; she went to her room and threw herself down on the bed and wept.

Freddy had gone to the hills after that first incident at her camp, but he had come back and would have shot Halford in the back and then escaped into the locked rim of the dim horizon. It was Freddy's way.

"Halford, oh, Halford," her heart was crying, "I saved you. You won't have her now, will you, Halford, the one you left in the east? Halford, you are mine, you are my picture, you are my mate, Halford. You don't love her, do you? She is just a part of the steel of your heart — you are mine."

When the supper bell rang she drew herself up, looked into the smudgy mirror and dried her eyes. Still they were red when she went out on the porch of the hotel to stand in the breeze a few moments to cool her fevered face.

"W'y, here you are, Little Sunset. I have been searching for you everywhere. It is supper time and I can't go down without you." He stepped closer, took one of her trembling hands in his and told her what had happened in the chaparral at the

lake. She watched his agitated face with such calm as she could force.

"And you didn't use your cannon at all?" she asked.

"I didn't even see who it was. He was intrenched somewhere in the chaparral and I would have been a fool to have attacked him. He thought he had me the first shot and hid." She looked away across the street to the dim sky-line.

"Do you think it could have been Freddy?" asked Halford. "I knew he couldn't shoot through all these clothes," said Halford, releasing her hand.

"Or was it the steel armor that protected you?" she asked, with a swift sweep across his face. He was silent.

Arda was much worried. She knew only the law of self-defense and the law of protecting those she loved. What might happen she could not tell. What Freddy might do she could only guess. She must be very watchful, she knew.

After supper she evaded Halford in the hotel office and went out on the street. She looked up and down in the darkness. In front of Thompson's two horses were tied and one of them was Freddy's. He had come back and some one was with him. Just then her eyes, now accustomed to the darkness, saw two figures going up the walk past the livery-stable. They stepped behind a vacant shack a few rods beyond. A moment took her stealthily to the opposite side of the vacant building.

"The commissioner is out of town," Freddy was saying. "He will not return until after eight o'clock. Dude Eastern will not go up the Chilco

trail with her now. She goes tomorrow. He will get fifteen years for this, in prison, and I will get her kisses. Sure she done it, damn her, but we have the advantage. It is better than killing him. She will be gone tomorrow." There was a slight chuckle of victory and the two stepped to the walk. Arda slipped to the rear of the empty building and listened until the steps had died away beyond the livery. On the walk she hesitated a moment, then crossed to the chaparral. They were going to put Halford in prison was all that filled her mind. She had no idea of how it was going to be done but that they would do so was evident to her. She ran across the waste to the trail leading around the lake, in a desperation. At the camp she found a bridle and going up the hill caught Halford's bay, saddled her and rode across the flat up the finger pointing to the north. Here she tied the horse to a tree close to the trail. She only knew that something was about to befall Halford and her plan was primitive.

Hurrying back to the village Arda walked into the hotel, her heart pumping blood to cool the throbbing flame of her brain. Her eyes went swiftly over the hotel office searchingly.

"Mr. Chase has gone to his room," said the landlord. "It's number ten."

She hesitated a moment, then slipped stealthily down the narrow hall and rapped on his door.

"Come in," he said.

Still she hesitated a moment before opening the door. Entering she closed the door quickly behind her and met Halford's smile with a color mounting to her agitated face. He surveyed her quizz-

cally, then the alarm that was making her tremble went to her eyes. Halford rose from the letter he was writing.

"Halford," she began, "they will be here before long; you must go at once." Her words were incoherent; they rang with alarm and fear. His smile broadened. She could not understand the easy, almost careless manner of the man.

"Who is coming? What have I to fear? Why shouldn't I meet whoever comes? You don't mean it's Freddy?" He stepped to her and she lifted the startled little face to meet the eyes of the picture.

"The officer. He is coming to send you to prison for fifteen years for trying to kill Freddy." She took down his mackinaw coat hanging on the wall to hurry him into it.

"I don't understand. Has Freddy been hurt?" he queried. "What little joke is this you are playing, Little Sunset?" If he suspected her of setting a trap to win him no one shall ever know. But Halford did not misconstrue that gaze which went to him pleadingly from unfathomable depths.

"Freddy got his hand shot when you were down to the lake to-night. That shot wasn't for you at all. He is claiming you did it — he is having you sent to prison. Halford, you are a stranger; you threatened him the first night you were here." Halford's brow clouded.

"I didn't threaten him, Little Sunset. We were at cards and he called me a damned thief because I won his money. I told him that men had been killed for insults of that kind. I didn't even see Freddy at the lake; I supposed he was after me." Still Hal-

ford was thoughtful. The full import of Arda's alarm did not impress him at once.

"Freddy had his hand shot down there and he is claiming you did it. He has a pal, Halford, who will say just what Freddy wants him to — a dozen will swear that you went over the ridge a few minutes before the shot was fired — plenty will tell of the threat. He is having you put in prison for fifteen years." The threatening import of her words went to his brain like a crash. She was holding the coat and he slipped into it and reached for his chaps.

"What am I to do; where am I to go? I see, Little Sunset, that you want me to escape — where?"

"Halford," she trembled, "I got the bay tied to a tree half a mile up the trail. Go out of the window and ride up to the timbered mountain I pointed out to you yesterday. It is fifteen miles away and I shall pick you up on my way tomorrow. They will get you if you attempt to go any other way. They will think you have escaped when they see me leaving town alone. When you leave Harvey's place you can go to the coast, Halford. I will take you."

He was soon in his chaps and his hat was drawn tightly over his brow. Stepping to the window, he raised it and looked into the night. It repulsed him. With a quick turn he took Arda in his arms, swung her free of the floor in his embrace and kissed her on the lips, twice.

"God bless you, Little Sunset, good-by." And releasing her he stepped out into the night.

She stared after him dreamily, half filled with fear, half with ecstasy, trembling with an uncontrollable

emotion. He had taken her up so quickly and kissed her that the realization of it left her powerless to move. Her heart was beating tumultuously. He had taken the kisses she had been saving for the picture.

"Halford, oh, Halford, you knew I was saving them for you, so you took 'em. They were all I had to give, but you won't turn me back now, will you? I am your mate, Halford. Don't you hear, I am your mate. I felt your heart beating when you were far away, and you came on the first, the very first train and took all I got to give, my mate. You couldn't do it, leave me, now, could you, Halford, after taking 'em?" Her heart was speaking into the night the way he had gone and the tumult kept up without measurement of time, except as time is measured by heart-throbs, thrills and happiness. The kisses were burning on her lips and she could not move.

"I'm his mate," she kept saying, as if nothing else in the world mattered.

Finally she stepped to the window and the silence seemed to strike her with a blow and she realized all that had happened. Seeing the letter on the table she could not resist a glance. She picked it up and read:

*"My Dear Father:*

"I am starting for Uncle Harvey's place to-morrow morning, two hundred miles away in the very heart of the mountains and the wilderness. I have met another Nile sunset girl. She is a neighbor of Harvey's and is showing me the way. Strange, isn't it, how all the sun-

sets are close to the dust? This one is not only a sunset but the sun besides. I will be home in time to carry out the plans and the life you have blazed for me."

Several times she read it over, several times her heart gained a beat, then she thrust the letter into her pocket quickly, to take it to the mate on the morrow.

## CHAPTER XII

### ON THE TRAIL

Arda was about to turn to the door when she heard voices and footsteps in the hall. Waiting for them to pass by, so that she would not be seen stepping from Halford's room, she turned to let down the window out of which he had flown. He was doubtless on his bay horse before now and hastening.

She met the stare of the two men, the officer and Freddy, bravely as they pushed the door open uninvited and stood condemnningly before her. She knew nothing of officers except that they were a menace to liberty. Accusation was in his face but she met his gaze with a claim of innocence.

"Halford is not here. We were to start for Chilco to-morrow and I came to tell him to be ready for an early start." She made a pretty picture standing there in her defense of the man and herself under the searching, inquiring eyes of Freddy and the officer. They did not speak. "Did you want Halford?" she asked simply.

She knew what they were thinking. "We want him, perhaps, more than a girl who would come to his room in the night." The scar on Freddy's cheek was vibrating with malice and jealousy as he spoke. His wounded hand was in a sling and lying on his breast. The officer was evidently in doubt as to his immediate duty, for a man in authority hates to be

beaten, and while Freddy was contemplating other matters the officer believed she had come to the Easterner's room to warn him. "He isn't here," she said. "I don't know where he has gone."

"Better come along with us," said the officer, keeping a suspicious eye upon her. They turned out of the door and Arda followed. At the desk in the hotel office they learned that Halford had paid his bill and had gone to his room early in the evening. At the livery stable they learned that he had taken his horse out in the afternoon. At least there was suspicion that he had planned an escape in advance and evidently he was not to be found for the officer reported at twelve o'clock to the commissioner that no trace of the "criminal" could be found, so Arda was permitted to go her way.

It was three o'clock in the morning when Arda went to the hillside for the horses in a desperation to be off on the trail. Wrangling them into camp she cinched the pack-saddles hurriedly and packing the grub-pack went over town. Thompson helped her with the heavy pack and with the diamond hitches; and long before sunrise, at the first ray of early, chilly morning, astride Light Foot and with Croppy's lead-rope in her hand and the tinkle of his bell close behind, she started up the finger pointing to the dim horizon, the gray, somber north. Her eager eyes were fixed and centered and anxious on the timbered mountain far away where the mate was to wait. The eternal painter was soon getting out his color pot and his palette for the work of the day. Soon the background of blue and gray began to brighten along the horizon to the east with a dim

splash of amber just to try out the brushes. At night when the picture was being completed would he throw on his most color effect and then with one sweep smudge the whole canvass with somber night. As the sun came up, the rim of white about Arda's eyes became more fixed and eager on the timbered mountain now gradually assuming detail in the narrowing distance. Now the ravines came out more distinctly, now the ridges brightened in the sunlight. Often she turned back with a hurried sweep of alarmed eyes, to see if any one was following, but always she turned back up the finger with more wistful gaze to the scene that drew her on. The small stream feeding Fish lake had now narrowed to a trickle in the overhanging grassy banks, the timber had become more dense, the shade and the concealment more cool and assuring. At a spring, the last until she passed over to the next creek, she stopped for the horses to range for half an hour. From the knoll where she lay during that half hour she could see down the finger into the village. Down it she watched for a movement of horses or rider or a spiral of dust that might warn her of pursuing horsemen.

At twelve-thirty she took the tinkling bell from Croppy's neck and instead of following the main trail went out into the timber to the right and set her gaze on the timbered mountain. The eternal painter had moved his color pot into the west for the evening splash. When she had reached the foot of timbered mountain and crossed a small stream which cut around its southern base she was compelled to go much slower. The mountain was cut with innumerable ridges which flattened into the valley farther down

the slope where the trail ran. On each ridge she stopped to "halloo" to the echoes of the timbered mountain, then she crossed to the next ridge. Time was slipping away rapidly now, for she stopped often and waited long for a response from the concealing timber. The painter had set his color pot down on the rim of the opposite mountain in readiness to tip out his colors on his palette. With one quick stroke a line of crimson went across the horizon and in a few minutes the whole color pot was emptied and thrown over into the great abyss beyond. Then the painter commenced.

Arda hallooed up and then down the mountain and crossed ridge after ridge, wondering if Halford had failed her. He might have made his escape in some other direction or, being unfamiliar with the wilderness, he might have gone to the wrong mountain to wait for her. A desperation seized her. He would not attempt escape in the hills alone, she finally concluded. He must be waiting for her somewhere. She would round the base and if he did not answer her call she would turn the horses in the meadow and search for him.

She went two miles and soon a faint sound came in answer to her call. He had answered, and she was filled with exaltation. She called often and his answering voice guided her on. Croppy had his lazy head set on stealing bunch-grass along the way and the other packs were lingering behind. It was getting dark. She bent in the saddle and pulled tightly on Croppy's rope, and the answering voice grew louder and louder. It came now to be a thrill in Arda's heart. She could feel the heart throbs of the

mate and she tried to pull Croppy into a trot, but his stubborn head was more intent on stealing a nip along the trail. Soon passing over a ridge she saw Halford sitting on a log, and the bay grazing a few rods away.

"Helloo, Little Sunset," he shouted with a smile.

"Helloo, mate," she said as if afraid.

"Gods, Little Sunset, this has been a long day and night waiting for you, but it has been worth it. I waited down in Egypt last summer for a whole week just to see one of those real sunsets on the Nile. Now for recompense. Tell me all about what has happened. I am sore every inch of me," which was evident in his walk, which had lost all its light step and grace.

"Well," said Arda, with a smile that she had found him safe, "they found me in your room. Came after you left and I had no time to get away. They thought I had gone to warn you and took me all over town, but released me about twelve."

In recognition of her warning which had come just in time and her risk for her name, he bowed his head for a moment.

"Let them think what they may, Little Sunset, about your being there. I know — what matters the rest?" He spoke as if he was to give recompense for it all.

"I succeeded in convincing them that you had escaped early in the evening and had failed to wait for me to go up Chilco."

His face brightened into hers. "Did you really lie for me, Little Sunset, did you?" He was stroking Light Foot's velvety neck, looking up at her.

"Maybe I did, Halford." The kiss was still burning on her lips and she searched the spot where it had gone very wistfully. Halford trembled for her. Perhaps he ought not to go to Harvey's with this girl of the north who would save her kisses for a picture and lie to save him from arrest. He was beginning to understand the dream of those eyes which always drew the curtain back when he gazed into them.

"I'll hate to disappoint you, Little Sunset; I'll hate it as much as you but you see my heart is steel, Chase Manufactured steel, love proof," he said to himself. She jumped to the ground.

"You better ride Light Foot, Halford. I will ride the bay, for we got to make the meadows tonight for water and feed for our horses. Light Foot will be careful of you."

Mounting the bay, she rode across the ridges and Halford drove the lagging packs, trying to find an easy position in the saddle, which proved quite useless. No words were spoken until the stars had appeared.

"It ain't far now, Halford."

"Hope not, Little Sunset."

It was eight when she drew up to a small stream cutting a grassy basin. She sprang to the ground and was staking the bay to a tree while Halford climbed down out of his saddle and limped about for a moment to limber his legs.

"I have the bay staked, Halford. I will hobble Croppy and the rest will stay." It took but a few minutes to set all the packs on the ground, Halford helping her with the heavy ones. Arda soon had a

fire kindled and had commenced to prepare the supper. Halford brought a bucket of water from the creek, moving about like a very clumsy child, then he gathered wood for the fire.

"What are we having to eat, Little Sunset?" he asked, breaking up limbs and placing them under the frying-pan.

"Spuds, bannock and grouse and coffee." A glance from him brought humor to her face. "You wish you were back home, don't you, Halford?"

"What, me! You think I am a quitter. Little Sunset, no one ever had that opinion of me before. I guess you are the only one in the world I would let say I wanted to go back where there are no resisting forces. They just pull me along back home with a string, you know."

"And you are always going to let them do it, are you? Like to be led around, do you, Halford—"

"Look here, Little Sunset. That's a sore spot with me and I don't want any one to touch it. You don't understand. There is a big house waiting for me built out of stone, and a big lawn in front and flowers and trees, and servants to wait on me, a factory for me to step into. I didn't want it, but I was born up the ladder quite a ways and I was convinced that to go down to the bottom would be the act of a coward. If I should tell them that I liked this better, they would call me a fool. I don't like to be called that.

"I have a girl back home all prepared for me; we are to be married Christmas, Little Sunset. She is up the ladder also and has promised to help hold me up there with her. If I should tell them that I liked

a Little Sunset girl better than Alice Fairmount, there would never be such a stir in Multnomah and I could hook onto their upturned noses. W'y, up on the top rungs of the ladder men and women are cast in pairs. We are going to be married Christmas and I have never kissed her. The top rungs of the ladder are way up in the cold currents and there are no romances." He told her this as a gentle warning. She was silent and thoughtful for many moments.

"Don't you like it up there, Halford?" she asked wistfully.

"They have made me say I like it, but it took them several years to do it. No, Little Sunset, I like this better with all my saddle boils. Perhaps it is because I am always looking down the ladder to see what I have missed instead of looking up as I should. Yet I would rather start at the bottom, with a girl — well, Little Sunset, with a girl like you. It would be a fine climb together. Of course we wouldn't always have life just like this, and I am sure we would get to the top, the very top, sometime."

Still her face turned to the fire was grave and thoughtful. "That's why you kissed me; you just couldn't help it, because I am your mate," she was saying to herself.

Soon supper was ready and Halford had such an appetite. He ate with relish a whole grouse and felt that it was going to hoot within him, he felt so good. After a long silence she said, "Did you ever have pennies put on your eyes, Halford?"

"If this could last always, I wouldn't want them ever to do so," he said.

"I did," she said, looking into the light. Halford

was lying close to the fire. She told him of her going to Jim Langborn's, their thinking she was dead, the digging of the grave, the making of the box, then her coming to life; of their thinking Freddy stole the pennies when she had only opened her eyes and they had dropped off. For a moment he listened, then he was silent, and turning to him she saw that he had fallen asleep. The previous night and day had crept into sleep; he could not resist. Arda washed the dishes and laid them away, then she sat down by the fire and looked into the silent night; the low-burning camp-fire penetrated for a short distance into the curtain of black. A low ridge separated them from the Chilco trail and it was the crest of this ridge that held her gaze. Not even Croppy's bell disturbed the silence, for she was determined that no sound would tell where they were camped.

Finally she jumped to her feet and wide eyes penetrated the gloom. Was it the flash of a camp-fire that sent that glow above the ridge or had her apprehensive brain served her a little trick? Arda hurried out into the night to the ridge and looked down the long slope to the trail. A glow came up the hill from the bottom. She went down the slope for half a mile and saw that the fire was kindled close to the creek in a clump of willows. She stole closer and saw Freddy and the officer getting supper over the blaze. It was now ten o'clock and they could not have been in camp for over a half hour. She lay down and crawled with much caution to within forty feet of the camp.

"If he has gone with her to Harvey's we shall

overtake them before they get far," said the officer in low tones. " You think Arda is helping him get away? "

Freddy's scar was turned to her and it vibrated treacherously.

" She went to his room, didn't she? " said Freddy with a slow turn of his head.

" Since we caught her there, it seems quite evident, Freddy," said the officer. " Innocently there, she went to warn him. The other reason for her going would help us none in this, so we must accept the innocent cause."

" Innocent be damned! They had their chance before then." Freddy moved restlessly. " It shows she is stuck on him and she will not let him get away from her. They are together this minute, I bet you. But my turn will come, damn him! " Freddy was thinking of the day he had foolishly agreed to shoot for her kisses on the road to Chilco. What a fool he had been to give up to her when she was in his power!

" Since we have all the other means of escape well guarded, our going this way, Freddy, will make the whole thing sure. I hope we may get him as I am looking for promotion and my theory is that her fascination for him will turn his head a little if he is the kind of man I take him to be, and he will take a few chances, if she has promised to take him safely to Harvey's, which I have no doubt she has."

It was well, perhaps, for both men that Halford Chase lay on the hill sleeping and that he was in danger. It was well that he was her picture, also, and that his safety meant more to her than her own

good name. Her eyes flashed at these accusations and she took a bead on Freddy's heart just to see how steady her nerves were and how long she could aim at a human heart without flinching. In the chilly night she lay and listened while they ate their supper. They did not speak any more, but plans were flitting over their faces, and the flicker of the fire made grim pictures before her. Soon each man rolled up in a blanket and lay down by the fire. Arda stole back up the hill. Her own camp-fire was burned low but she did not want the reflection of another to go up into the forest as a signal of their hiding. It was well that she had taken the hill instead of the trail.

Halford was still asleep. Sitting down she watched his calm face through the dim glowing light of the embers. Now and then a smile stole over it as if dreams were busy within. Then it would grow hard with that steel of his heart. Her mind went back to the night when they met on the depot platform. Even then his eager gaze had not refused the open entrance to her heart. When Freddy wrenched her wrist and he came, it was the same, only she thought he searched farther for something he wished to find deep, very deep within her soul. From the first he had called her "Little Sunset" and he had never seen a sunset before. Alice was not his sunset girl and he had never kissed her. That moment Halford took her in his arms and stole all that she had to give, came back in a tumult; the letter he had written to his father acknowledged that there was rebellion in his heart but that he would go home, in respect for the steel of his heart which he had tempered to resist something — love. To her, it half

seemed that he was hoping that she might melt that steel with tears, with passion and love, and that he would thank her for it.

"I won't let them get you, dear mate," she finally said in audible whispers which caused him to stir as if the words had gone direct to his heart. "You took the kisses I been saving for you so long. Freddy wanted them, but I saved them for you. I'm your mate so you couldn't help, just couldn't help it, could you, Halford, and you wouldn't want ever, ever to give them back. I am going to take you home so they can't ever get you, Halford, to put you in prison. It wouldn't make no difference to me. I'd wait always but she wouldn't, so they can't have you."

The fire burned out. She took a blanket from the pack and threw it over Halford, rolled up in another and lay down to wait for the morning.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE CLOSED DOOR

Arda went to sleep with the alarm of fear and apprehension set close to her sensitive ear. The camp-robbers were little round, feathery balls on their limbs in the trees when she arose. Not a chirp would come for several hours. The fire was dead gone and she kindled it into a small, a very small blaze for the officer who would claim the mate from her was not a mile away over the ridge. She watched the unsuspecting, peaceful face of the man for several moments, then went for a pail of water. At the creek she looked up into a cloudy sky that had been presaged by the brilliant sunset of the evening before. She went out into the forest a short distance to see if the horses had left. They were black spots in the meadow humped up to narrow the cold line about their bodies, patiently waiting for the morning. She set about the breakfast silently. A half hour went by.

“Halford!—Halford!” The curtain rolled back from the tired eyes.

“Good-morning, Little Sunset. You up?”

“Breakfast is ready, Halford,” she said. “We must hurry.”

“So early. I just got fitted into this nest of

mine. What time is it?" he said, rising to a sitting posture and looking at his watch. "W'y, Little Sunset, it's only a little after two. Do you always get up this early. It's in the middle of the night."

"Perhaps not so early to-morrow morning, Halford. You are wishing again that you were back where night extends half into the day," she complained.

"Quit it, Little Sunset. I wish I was right where I am. If this is the way you go at things, we could have a beautiful race starting at the foot of the ladder, always looking up, never looking back to see if we had missed something, afraid of a fall."

Halford got up to test his legs after a night's rest.

"I believe they are better. I am lame, but in a few days it will be a dream, a dream, looking into the sunset," he smiled. He walked about a few minutes then went to the fire and ate a few spuds, a slice of bacon and a little bannock.

"Too early for you, Halford?" she asked, seeing how little he ate. Not yet had he gotten one deep look into the sunset or that blue sky that led somewhere to paradise. Her face was evading him.

Soon the breakfast was over and the ponies were led up reluctantly and packed hurriedly. It took an hour to prepare for the trail.

"Better ride Light Foot again today, Halford, he is easier. That's how he got his name."

"I should be giving you the easy horse, Arda."

"Tomorrow, perhaps. Just ride behind and keep the packs following, for it is dark and they haven't had their breakfast, even Croppy the early bird of the flock feels the imposition on his original

customs. Croppy was born to habit but the others don't care."

There was an air of mystery about Arda, as she led Croppy out into the night. Halford had no idea where he was going, but he followed with an occasional rush upon the lagging packs, for Arda was spurring the bay on to haste and an occasional trot. She swung to the right around the foot of the mountain, and coming to a creek followed it up until it became a trickle in the overhanging pine-grass. Then, as the early morning broke, she went through a gap in the mountain over a pass and down a steep incline to a meadow where she turned to look back. Halford was coming, driving the packs. Halford did not know that their stubbornness in following Croppy was because they had turned from the main trail into an unknown region unfrequented by man. Halford was now through the gap. The door swung shut. Arda felt the jar of it against her heart.

She looked up the grassy slope to the mate coming. "It's closed against them, they can never follow now, they can't get you, Halford, and if they should it's my law that reigns here, these are my mountains, my rivers and my meadows. It's the law of cunning, the law of battle now, the law of a bead across a gun, and a steady hand, the law that says they can't have you, Halford, to put you in prison so I can't see you. I would wait, but she wouldn't. Good-by, officer; good-by, Freddy; good-by, little world, we are going to leave you for a time and when we come back — oh, Halford, if I ain't your mate, she'll be waiting for you, but she wouldn't wait fifteen years like I would."

That is what her heart was saying as the gate closed when Halford came down the meadow.

Halford had now driven the packs up and she started on. "Is this the trail to Harvey's, Little Sunset?" She drew up her reins and turned back.

"No, Halford. They were waiting just over the ridge for you last night."

"Who?" he asked.

"The officer and Freddy. I saw a flash like far-away lightning and went to the ridge. They were camped by a willow on the trail. They are going to follow the trail to Harvey's to get you. I got to take a new trail, Halford, a longer trail, but I can't let them get you. We will be all right — I know the way."

It was the first time this morning that she had turned to him the uncurtained depths of blue and the full glow of the sunset.

"God bless you, Little Sunset," he said with a wistful turn. Then he laughed at the thought of this girl outwitting the officers of a government for him.

"If they could only see me from the top rungs of the ladder now. Alice and the rest, how their eyebrows would arch, how their noses would hook. Really, Little Sunset, it is so far down I doubt if they could see me and you."

"Would they come down to help you, Halford, if you needed them?"

"Not as you are doing, Arda. They wouldn't, they couldn't. How pater would groan if he knew I was depending on a Nile sunset girl for safety. No, they would never take the chance of coming down

the ladder for me. They don't do that where men and women are cast in pairs. You got to keep on the same rung with them all the blessed time or they let you slip. I suppose I am just a speck down here, and they think they are illuminating, twinkling stars up there. What if I should fail them, Little Sunset, what if I should, just for you. Don't you know, when I came back from Europe not a month ago, I turned my back on the east right in one of the streets of Multnoma. I have half a mind to turn my back on it again." What a way he had of causing her heart to throb hopefully. He must mean it, she had seen how he must.

"Oh, Halford, don't talk so." Would he be glad when he found out where she was taking him. She believed he would when the wound caused from the shattering of the steel about his heart had healed.

"Don't you want me to, Little Sunset?" She would never admit how much she wanted him to speak as he did, not until he had acknowledged that she was his mate.

She did not answer but he saw the exaltation that was throbbing within the great soul she carried in so small a breast.

"I might disappoint you, Halford, I might hurt you and you might want to go back," she said, turning across the meadow.

He followed. "No, you wouldn't, Little Sunset. It hurt when you called me an Eastern dude once, and again when you compared me with Freddy; but a sunset very, very seldom hurts."

They were now in a mist; it soon commenced to rain. No one could follow now, for their tracks

were being washed away, the door which swung shut at the gap was locked by the mighty elements. God had turned the key and turned it over to Arda.

They traversed grassy meadows, rounded bunch-grass hills, followed up trickling streams, rushing torrents, mile after mile, day after day, crossing and recrossing, rounded rocky points, shell-rock mountains, climbed mountain after mountain, ridge after ridge. Still it was murky, and gloomy, but Halford kept up an incessant whistle that brought a smile to Little Sunset. His saddle boils had gone, his muscles had hardened, and now he was mounted on the bay following the sunset, only it was an aurora in the northeast — yet to Halford it was still sunset. Smiles flashed across his face, yet he kept the steel of his heart tempered for the future. The rain one day turned into snow and melted.

Each day they startled several deer from the thickets, and grouse were in abundance. Often they lingered of a morning or an evening to catch trout for a change of diet. The sun would have arisen at all points of the compass for Halford had there been a sun. Once she went around a mountain to spin his sense of direction. She had measured her distances well, for instead of coming two hundred miles they had made more than three hundred.

"When do we reach Harvey's?" asked Halford.

"If the officer is waiting it is best for you that we never reach his place, Halford," she said.

"Do you think they would wait long, Little Sunset?" he asked, whistling the song of the mate which Arda had so often sung over an evening camp-fire.

"Just think how short this is going to be, Little

Sunset. Then Christmas and the mills and the noose about my neck will be tied to a fly-wheel and I will go spinning. How the gold will rattle in my pockets!"

"Is that all there is on the top rungs of the ladder, Halford?"

"About all there would be for me."

"That is all you want, just gold? Is all the gold up there, Halford?" she asked with a strange whimsicality and with a pretty glance like a sun peeping over a ridge out of the sunset.

"All up there," said Halford. "If I could have you and the gold both and the race up. But, really, I could sit here on the bank of this stream and fish for ten dreamy years and watch the sunset." At this camp Arda lingered later than usual and far into the afternoon, much to Halford's delight. For a few days the sky had cleared but again a gauze was banking on the western rim.

"Perhaps you can have them all, Halford, if the shattering of your steel heart is not too painful," she thought.

Soon after they started on the trail they startled their first caribou from the timber. Halford watched him bound over the meadow with surprise and wonder. "Why don't we get one of them, Little Sunset?"

"Tomorrow, Halford, perhaps." He could not understand the tones as if they rang from a great abyss and vibrated to the top along a rocky wall.

They met an Indian, the first human life they had seen for fifteen days, and Arda stopped to talk with him in his native tongue. It was a strange, a quaint greeting. The Indian watched Halford with primi-

tive humour and with fantastical delight. Once he laughed and nodded in answer to something Arda said. Halford watched him as intently as he was in turn scrutinized by the savage. This was the first evidence of displeasure that went over Halford's face. The meeting with the Indian, and the deep-set eyes and high cheek bones left Halford uneasy.

"He is Red Lightning," said Arda, in answer to Halford's question when they had made a turn in the river. "He traps in the north and is now out hunting caribou for his winter's meat."

"Well named," said Halford. It was evident that the meeting of Red Lightning disturbed Halford, for he no longer whistled into the echoing hills, and shadows flitted over his face.

It was evening when they came to a grassy slope reaching over a ridge and to a high rocky pinnacle to the East. At the top of the ridge they looked down into a basin on the calm surface of a lake with three mammoth black rocks in the center lifted out of the clear blue; across the lake was a timbered flat. On a bench at the foot of the ridge on which they stood there was a cabin.

"Is that Harvey's?" asked Halford, with a thrill of delight at the pretty, inviting scene below.

She did not answer. With the stiff, chilly wind whipping the brown locks about her shoulders she went down and Halford followed. At the cabin she commenced to unpack the horses.

"What shelter, Little Sunset, for the coming storm! Won't the owner of this cabin care or has he deserted it?" She kept busily at the task of unpacking and did not answer, nor did her eyes meet

his. He helped her now with as much cleverness with the packs as years had taught her. She tied the bay to a tree with a long rope and hobbled Croppy according to custom.

Halford opened the door of the cabin with wide eyes. "Whew, Little Sunset, what luck, it's all furnished; stove and dishes and chairs and everything. Say, do you know whose cabin this is? Won't he put us out, will he care?"

"No; I know who owns it. It's all right, Halford." She went to a pile of wood and splitting an armful started to kindle a fire. Halford pushed her aside and started the fire himself, then brought the grub-pack inside.

"Say, Little Sunset! I bet a woman lived here, everything is as clean as a night sky."

"Yes, Halford."

Soon the strange manner of the girl changed. He had never seen Little Sunset so brilliant and radiant as she was that evening. On the long trail they had tuned their voices and they sang together the song of the mate which she had taught him.

"They will never get you, now dear mate. And if you want, you can have your sunset, and the gold and the climb, the race up the ladder. But oh, Halford, will you want me when you know what I have done," she said to herself.

A tremble went over her like that caused by a blizzard of wind.

"I have done it for you, Halford. If you don't want me, you can go back to her, but they can't have you — they can't — they just can't have you to put in prison, because she wouldn't wait."

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE HEART OF SHATTERED STEEL

"Well, Little Sunset, I suppose you will leave me here until you go down to Harvey's and see if it is safe for me to venture from the lair." He whistled about the room in his most jovial mood. No man was ever surer of himself than Halford Chase, this night out of the storm. A candle flickered on the kitchen table and Arda sat reticently by in a mood that was far unbecoming for a sunset. It was the tender heart of Halford Chase that spoke, encased within the armor of tempered steel. Many years had been spent in the temper of it and it could ward off the attacks of Cupid's arrows dipped in the poison of love. He was love-proof, and while he might say and feel a few tender words and in an unguided moment take a kiss that had been saved for him out of the turbulence of Freddy's passion and enjoy the burn of it on his lips and in the tender, encased soul, he knew it would all end in a simple rendezvous. His life was made, his future was decided upon and he felt the hardness ruling over him.

It was daybreak the following morning when Halford Chase heard a movement in the adjoining room and soon Arda's door opened to the kitchen and living-room. A fire was kindled and then the outer door opened and closed.

Halford dressed himself hurriedly and stepped to the open. His brow knit; a foot of snow lay on the hills, but the clouds had broken with a chilly wind from the northwest. The dreary scene was the first suspicion that he was entrapped in a winter's snow. The thought flashed through him and the steel armour of his soul resounded with a threatening ring. The horses were nowhere to be seen.

Looking up the bench, at the foot of the mountain rising to the rocky pinnacle, he saw Arda kneeling in the snow, her footsteps leading from the cabin door. Soon she rose and came toward him with bowed head, and as she drew near he saw a misty film in her reddened eyes. He did not greet her. It was the steel of him that kept him silent, for it was predominating in his heart at this threatening moment. She passed by him without turning and went to the ridge; to look for the horses, he thought. Halford was now nursing his wrath. Her failure to greet him with her usual good-morning spoke of a consciousness of guilt. He followed her tracks to the spot where she had knelt. A rough-hewn slab emerged from the snow and a mound ran back a few feet. On the slab which had been hewn with an ax from the primitive timber of the north was this strange and paradoxical inscription:

Two lie here side by side,  
I who live and he who died.

Halford looked to the wind-swept hill where she was standing, looking off into the trail down the mountainside, her brown locks lashing about her shoulders. A forlorn picture she made. The in-

scription was plain, but her heart was buried with another. Five generations of Chase pride and twenty-two years of offended vanity was in revolt. Curses and malediction hissed from his set teeth. The Chase demon was in him and when he met her at the cabin he was insane, crazed beyond physical or mental control.

Satan's fall was as sudden as a kick at the back door of paradise. It is only a step back to the primitive. Halford was surrounded with the primitive, to it he must appeal.

"The horses have gone, Halford," she said with a tremble of exposed culpability.

"You did not bring me to Harvey's," he hissed.

"Oh, Halford, I couldn't let them get you —"

"That little plan of a pursuing officer to lead me unsuspecting into the snow-bound north was prettily arranged." She did not meet the flash of his eyes. She could feel the resistance, the revolt against the shattering of the armored steel. It was making him delirious. He recalled now that every intimation of the accusation against him for an attempt at Freddy's life, every suggestion for his escape had come from her. It was a lie, there was no officer and Freddy had not been shot!

"You have brought me here for the winter." The man had left Halford Chase, a demon had entered in its place.

"Oh, Halford!"

"That Indian came for the horses. You asked him to." Tears flowed down her cheeks.

"You think I would remain here with you. You think I will submit to ruin at your hands. One of

us must go." He paced the floor like a wild, caged beast, his face was red, panting and terrible.

"But, Halford, the snow has closed the trail. We would die."

"Let us see who it shall be, you or I." The storm had reached its height. She doubted if he knew what he was saying.

He took her six-shooter from her side and thrust it into her hand and drew his own.

"Better to die than ruin, the kind you have given."

"Oh, Halford, you want to kill me." She tried to argue with him until his passion had cooled.

"I am giving you an equal chance. Your aim is better than mine. One of us must go."

She looked at his weapon. "You think it *would* be an even chance. I could kill you, Halford, at twenty paces," she said, but her effort to restrain him was useless.

"Better that than this. You can lay me beside that other man you put in his grave."

"Halford, oh, Halford!" Tears dropped from her eyes and burned on the fevered cheeks. Yet she knew it would be so when the moment for the shattering of the steel came.

"Come!" he stepped to the door. She followed to his rough clinching grasp. A short distance from the door, back to back, he stepped ten paces in the snow. She leaped to make the distance greater and then turned to face him. She had never seen such a demon in a face.

"Just a moment, Halford," she pleaded. She brushed an obscuring veil from her eyes then stared

up at him straight, fearlessly, proudly. "I done it for you, Halford, for you. I had to save you."

"Shoot, damn you, shoot," he shouted, but her six-shooter hung at her side.

He raised and fired, still she stared into the threatening muzzle of his gun and did not fall. This tormented him.

"Shoot, damn you, until one of us falls." And he shot again, then again as she stood with her proud, fearless face turned up to him. What a demon the shattering of the tempered heart of steel had made him. He emptied his gun, then her face went down, she staggered and fell into the snow.

Nothing but her fall would have broken the spirit of the demon within him. She had hoped his wrath would cool in a few minutes, and so she had widened the space between them in a desperate hope that his untrained hand could not send a bullet home. It was a moment when only a crisis will serve to turn the tide. The frenzy must be quenched with blood as in '98, those days of terror's reign.

Seeing her fall, Halford stepped toward the cabin and entered, threw down his weapon on the floor and paced the room. He could feel the crumbling of the soul of steel, the particles at white heat melted and dripping down left a pain within. He could not count the minutes that went by. He felt the shattered trembling of his body. Sitting down with wild, frenzied eyes he looked out the small window into the distant mountains to the northwest. The heart that was once encased in that armor of steel gave a tumultuous heave and a deep breath went into his lungs and out spasmodically. He was trying to

think what had happened; vague ideas were coming. He heard a sound, and turned. Something blackened the tail of his eye. He stared at the open door and a figure was leaning against the casing. She had come to haunt him. He must stay here all the winter alone and she had come to haunt him. A delirium went through his brain, a haunting fear. Ideas began to shape. What had he done. He tried to think, sitting like a statue chiseled out of rock. His eyes were fixed on the dim sky-line and on the glistening snow far away. He tried to recall just what had happened and how. On the far-away horizon he saw something stagger and fall. He started — what was it? Something sank down within him. Where was Arda? His brain was burning, it was breaking. What had happened? Something jarred like footsteps against his soul. He felt something steel cold creeping about his neck and over his shoulder. Still his eyes were on the faraway horizon, the dim clouded sky-line searching to see what it was that had fallen in the snow. Something pressed heavily on his shoulder and then a voice came out of the distance and he could just hear it spasmodically faint and pitiful and pleading.

"Halford!" Still he did not move. "I couldn't let them have you. She wouldn't have waited for you fifteen years." The sound ceased again. Something hot lay against his cheek. "I love you, Halford, I wanted you to be happy. I done it all for you. If you hadn't wanted me you could have gone to her in the spring. I would have taken you where they couldn't have found you. I could have killed you, dear mate, but I wanted you to live. I wanted

you to be happy, for you was my picture so I had to bring you here so they couldn't get you. You want me to die, Halford. I got to die so you can have your chance, and my picture will be gone. You took the kisses I saved for you, always for you, dear mate, saved from Freddy so you could have them. There's only one more, dear mate —" her voice broke. He felt something cold and icy against his cheek as her lips found his. "You want me to die — good-by, dear mate, good-by."

Every faculty within him was numbed. He had a faint consciousness of something cold slipping from his supporting shoulder, and then a thud upon the floor brought him to his feet. A flash went over him and through his brain. He jumped up, startled, to his feet. "God, oh, God, what have I done? Forgive me — what have I done?"

He turned to see Arda lying beside him and the woolen waist about her breast was stained red, and down the woolen skirt was a trickled streak. Something was pounding in his head as if to awaken him from a dream. It beat with crumbling blows. He sank down and bent over her. "God, oh, God, what have I done? What was that sound I heard, was it Little Sunset, that fell in the snow so far, so very far away. Little Sunset, how did you get here so far through all this snow?" His eyes dimmed, he bent farther down and kissed the chilly, pallid lips that had no tremble in them, no response. His tears fell in streams upon her cold cheeks.

"Little Sunset, I don't want you to die. I know why you brought me here. A fairy came to tell me or was it you, Little Sunset, was it you speaking?

The voices came so far I thought it was a fairy. You came to tell me before you went. I don't want you to die," he cried out many times. A movement came to the lips, the eyes half-opened.

Halford picked her up and carried her to her room and laid her gently down, then closed the outer door and built a fire. He held the chilly hands in his to warm them and soon he felt that they were not so cold. He brushed the brown locks from her face and when once her lips trembled and an expression of life came to her face he bent over her and whispered, "Little Sunset, I want you to live. It was the devil in me that done it, Little Sunset, and the heart of steel they gave me out of all those years." How long he waited by her bedside he had no recollection, save that he was watching for a lifted eyelash that would tell him that she had heard.

## CHAPTER XV

### THE HAUNTING FIGURE AT THE DOOR

Halford watched the dimming sunset, expecting every moment to see the flush, the crimson of it swiftly hurled into obscuring night; but Arda continued to breathe with a silent movement of the breast which he had washed and bandaged. The wound was higher in the shoulder than he at first had feared. The only stimulant, the only healing balm he could administer was, "I want you to live, Little Sunset," and the prescribed portion was administered very often. He hoped that she might hear. He found a white cloth in her room and boiled it before applying it to the wound. All night the dying demon within him watched over her and still her breast rose and fell and still her heart beat out the quiet hours. Often his hand went to her breast to make sure that the pulse there was keeping pace with his own hopes.

Only once that night did she open her eyes and stare up, sadly, hopelessly toward the ceiling. He was quick, very quick with the potion which he pressed to her lips gently, "I want you to live, Little Sunset; the demon is gone. Don't be afraid to come back."

During those anxious moments when the sunset seemed to sink from her face, and there were many of

them, he could see the haunting figure coming in through the door as he had seen it when he sat by the kitchen table looking far away to the northwest into the gray, eerie storm. It haunted him and it was not for the recovery of the girl alone that he kept crying, "Come back, Little Sunset, and drive it away; it's following me and I can't get away from it." He drew closer to her, sank down by the bed and waited for the hours of the night to go, sleepless, disturbing hours that crept into the past.

He was at the kitchen stove cooking a breakfast at the early dawn of day when he heard a sound and hurried to the door.

"Halford, have you gone back to her, have you left me to die, Halford? Can't you hear me calling, have you gone out in the snow to find her? Halford don't you know the snow will get you, it has no pity and it is so cold, oh, so cold." He was down in front of the bed and she talked for a long time. Often she roused from delirium and always her words were the same. "Why don't you call me back if you want me to come? I can't come without you call. Do you want me to die, when I saved you for her, so they couldn't get you? She wouldn't wait for fifteen years like I would. Yes, dear mate, I would wait always and the prison would make no difference because I know you are innocent. If you don't want me you may go to her in the spring, it's so short a time but not near so long as it would have been if they had got you. I saved you, Halford, just you, my happy day don't make much difference, but you got to be happy, Halford. I wish I could make you happy but I can't because you are my picture but I

ain't yours. You ain't got no picture, have you, Halford? She ain't your mate but you're going back to her. Freddy wasn't my mate, but I saved the kisses and you got them all, the very last one."

Intermittently she talked, then slept, but her heart beat against his trembling hand often, very often. He listened, with tears dropping from his cheeks, to all her ramblings. It gave him hope to listen to her, for her words seemed to come nearer each time. Three long anxious days went by and then she called to him in a voice that made his response very prompt, for the voice was clear.

"Halford!"

He was kneeling at her side almost as soon as the word was spoken. A smile went up from the bed and her eyes met his now with a glow of recognition.

"I thought you had gone."

"Think I would leave you here, to let you die?" he said with a wistful glance down at her. She searched long but the steel armor of his heart was gone, yes it was gone, she had shattered it, but the shattering had almost cost her own life and his.

"Did you hear me calling you, Little Sunset?"

"Was that you calling? I heard something. What did you say, Halford, were you calling to her?"

"I wanted you to live, Little Sunset."

"Yes, I heard and I kept coming, just kept on coming and, Halford, I tried, oh, so hard, to come back to see if you really were calling to me. Did you mean it, Halford, do you want me to stay now I am here?"

"Yes, Little Sunset. I don't know why I did

that. I was mad, delirious, I can scarcely remember, it seems like a shadow. For a time I did not know what I had done. When I came into the house I saw something fall far, very far away. It was you, Little Sunset, then you came in and told me. Do you remember?"

She shook her head. "I just remember of falling in the snow. That was the last, and how you looked, oh, so terrible, Halford."

Several moments of silence went into the past.

"What did I say?" she asked, and a smile went across her face.

"You told me why you brought me here."

"Did you believe me then?"

"Yes."

"Halford, how awful you were when you came back from father's grave that morning." She looked away as if she knew he had thought it some other she loved and that it had made a difference. "When was it, Halford?"

"Four days ago," he answered. "You went a long ways, Little Sunset, a very long ways and I thought you were never coming back."

He turned away. Her father's grave. It did make a difference. She must have divined his thoughts, for out of respect she was silent for many moments.

"Halford, you thought it was some one else there. Was it that which made you so mad at me? Did it make so much difference as that?"

"You have seen how much difference it made, Little Sunset, but don't let us talk about it. Say that you forgive me and tell me all, all about how

you happened to live here, tell me about your north and your father and your mother, everything, Little Sunset."

"Can I forgive you, Halford? Tain't for me to forgive. I'm just not going to remember. I knew something terrible was going to happen when you found out what I had done but, Halford, I wouldn't have let them have you if I had died. If I hadn't heard you calling, oh, so much, I wouldn't never, no never have come back. I know now it wasn't you done it, Halford, just the demon we all got in us, only something don't always happen to let it loose in us to do them things; no Halford, you wasn't to blame."

"Tell me the other things, Little Sunset."

"Halford, before I tell you about father, tell me you're going to stay and not try the snow for going back — be you going to stay, Halford? Then if I ain't your mate, you can go to her next spring. But I'm always going to stay here." There was a silence. "I knew I was going to fail Jim Langborn sometime and now I done it. What do you think Jim will say when he sees the horses coming home without me and no grub. No, Halford, I'm going to stay here."

"Yes, Little Sunset, I'm going to stay, perhaps, not always," he said dreamily. His thoughts were drifting back to the life he had always lived, the life that was in his blood, to his mother's silent grave, the big house where she had died, where her dying words had made a pathway for the future.

"Then, Halford, you better go out on the ridge and get a caribou for us this winter. They will be

going south now that the snows have come and we got to have meat for the winter. I intended to get one but —” He turned quickly from her glance. “ Yes, Halford, I can stay here, I got back all right, guess I can stay alone. You better go early in the morning. Go up on the ridge to the south where we crossed when we looked down on the lake that night. You will find them there if you hunt a day. Father and I never failed to get one in a few hours. Will you, Halford? ”

“ Yes, Little Sunset, tomorrow. Now you rest and I will come back in a few minutes with some broth for you I saved from that grouse I got in the spruce down by the lake this morning. When I get the caribou you can tell me about how you happened to call this home.”

“ Yes, Halford.”

The next morning Halford took his rifle and started over the ridge and when night came Arda became anxious for him. When the door opened long after dark, she called, “ Is it you come, Halford? ”

“ Yes, and I got one,” he said, going to the bed. “ Wounded him at first and he took me a merry chase before I finally got him. I carried a quarter in with me. I am as tired and hungry as the Creator must have been at the end of his sixth day in the making of this big world, for we have no record of his ever having started labor again.”

“ I wish I could get your supper, Halford, if you’re so tired. Do you think He got so tired that He has deserted us all and don’t look after us now He put us here, Halford? ”

"I sometimes think He just turned us loose, Little Sunset, so He could rest."

"Don't guide us or ever tell us what He wants us to do to make us good and true?" she said.

"I have often thought that, Little Sunset." She was thoughtful for many minutes.

"Maybe in your cities, Halford, but not in the north."

Halford wondered at this. No, she was not accusing him for what had happened but he set quickly at the task of getting the supper.

"How are you, Little Sunset; got along without me I hope."

"I'm sure He has been lookin' after me since you left, Halford."

"Better than I could have done, I suppose, had I been here," he said, almost with accusation.

"Halford, I guess He wasn't lookin' after you when you said that." Again he hurried about his supper. When it was over he went to Arda's room and sat down beside the bed and said, "Now for that story you promised me, Arda, Little Sunset."

She turned brilliant eyes to him and they went deep into that unarmored heart. "I don't remember mother, Halford, just a woman, no kisses, no caresses or nothing, it was so long ago."

"Just your father," he said.

"Just him." She thought a moment.

"He got mother way up north, ever so much farther than this, on the Mackenzie." She hesitated.

"Won her with gum-drops, I suppose." There was a ring of the faraway east in his voice.

"With what, Halford?" came a flash of misunderstanding.

"Go on, Arda, tell me about it."

"They were prospectors and one was a woman — one of the men's sisters. They all perished but the woman, somehow, and father found her nearly starved, half-crazed with hunger. He brought her back like you did calling to me, Halford."

"Yes, Little Sunset, go on."

Often her passionate eyes went to him in a strange, mystified search, for since the rending of the heart of steel he was different.

"Father married her —"

"After they got out, escaped from the north?"

"No. Way up there, Halford. They didn't get out right away, they couldn't have done it. But they never separated until later. Married in the north."

"Common law, I suppose."

"God's law, Halford. He saved her, called her back to him."

"That is the code of the north, save a woman and she is yours," thought Halford. "Go on, Little Sunset. Just love each other and that is marriage."

"Then I came. They were still together seeking gold. Every day was just alike. Time wasn't anything way up there. I was four and they were camped close to the Mackenzie. Father was sick and she was taking care of him. He wanted a fish to eat so mother left me with him and in the canoe she went out into the Mackenzie and never came back. It was more than twelve years ago. I had

to look after father and bring him the things he wanted and get the wood for the fire. Father was trying to get the money to drain the lake here for the gold and was very hopeful."

"Here by the cabin, Little Sunset?" he asked, in surprise.

"Yes. It's full of gold but it has got to be drained. Father said it would take thirty thousand dollars. When mother did not return, he thought she had deserted him and he didn't get well for a long time. It drove him out of the north where they were looking for the discovery which mother and her brothers had made the year they all died. He brought me here. On the creek below the falls above the lake father dug for gold each summer and went out every third winter to get some one to give him the money to drain the lake to get the gold out. He came back disheartened each time. You see it took three summers to get enough gold to keep him a winter outside."

"And left you alone here all winter."

"Yes, Halford, I suppose just like you will do next spring." He squirmed, for he had betrayed the thoughts that went continually back to the home in the east.

"He never succeeded. Soon he got very strange and never talked to me. He said once every one thought him crazy. He said that when he came back one spring, the last time he ever went away. I nursed him that fall, all alone, but he died. Halford, he left me here. I buried him all alone out there where you went that morning. The day before he died he told me how he hated Jim Langborn, but to

go to the woman and tell her how he hated Jim and if she wanted me, then to stay with her."

"How did you know where to go?" asked Halford. He was following the grim, primitive story now, intently.

"He took me each summer to the top of the Chilco range where we could look down at Jim Langborn's place. There he cursed Jim silently for something he had done. So I knew where to go."

"That is why Jim Langborn disliked you and made you go after grub the time I met you! It has been a hard life, hasn't it, Little Sunset?"

"He knocked me down many times and I came near killing him once for doing it," she went on with a flash of bitter memory.

"What had you done to make him so angry, Little Sunset?"

"Looked at a picture over at Harvey's one day. I went away or I would have killed Jim Langborn that day, I couldn't a-helped it, I just couldn't have helped — I just couldn't have."

"Whose picture was it, Little Sunset? What made you look at it so long to make Jim so angry? What was there wrong in looking at a photograph?" She looked off a moment, then turned to the man beside her wistfully. That was the beginning of her happy day and a thrill went through her, but it soon sank back knowing that it would end in the spring.

"You see, Halford, way up here in the north, alone, I used to work on a picture, just one, Halford, to drive away the loneliness."

"And that was the picture you were looking at.

So you completed it did you, Little Sunset?" he said interestedly.

"Yes."

"I would like to see it, Little Sunset. You have it yet?"

"Yes."

"I'll bet it is nice if you made it and it took so very long."

A quizzical smile stole over her face. She had thought it the greatest picture in the world.

"I was just making it on my heart, Halford. Didn't you ever make that kind of pictures?"

"I guess I have. They were all just little sunset girls. But go on," he said eagerly.

"I made the eyes so they would look at me and speak, and a heart that would throb so I could feel it and know it when it should ever come close to mine; and the smile, it just kept right on smiling, but I dared never put on the nose and the hair and the chin and the ears and the color of the cheeks for fear I would get them wrong and I wouldn't know the picture when it came. I wanted them to match as I had never seen the face and I didn't want to make a mistake. I just knew as long as I had the right eyes and the smile and the heart throbs I could tell my picture, and then I could put on the nose and hair and chin and things on any old way in a hurry with pine pitch, if I had to get it finished in a hurry."

"What has all this to do with Jim Langborn's striking you at Harvey's?" asked Halford.

"Well, you see, Halford, when I seen the picture there, I knew just how to put on the nose and the chin and the hair and the ears, everything but the

color of the hair and the cheeks on my picture. You see I was completing the picture I had been working on so long and it took more time than I thought because I couldn't do it with pine-pitch, any old way. I just had to be careful about the job for I knew I could never change it then. Just as I got it finished Jim knocked me off my chair."

She surveyed the room in an absent sort of way that made Halford eager for the rest of the story.

"What did you do then to keep from killing Jim Langborn?"

"I just saddled up Light Foot and started home. Freddy followed me and was going to kiss me, because he wanted my picture to have a scar. When I told him I had saved them all for the picture he was going to take them and spoil my picture because I wouldn't have had anything for the picture at all and I couldn't a-saved it without any kisses."

She laughed.

"You ought to 'a' seen Freddy that day." It was real diverting humor that came out of memory. "He and Jim thought my picture was going to have a scare, but it didn't, and they were terribly mad at me for making it the way I did right before Harvey's so they could all see."

There was another silence.

"I shot with Freddy to see if I should save the kisses for the picture and I won."

She was looking up to the ceiling and Halford was watching the happy lines of her smiling face. There was something tantalizing in the humor of her gaze.

"That's a pretty little story, Sunset. And who

was the picture?" he asked out of curiosity, thinking it a fairy dream and that she would have one of her clever answers ready.

"It was you, Halford. So that was why Jim Langborn sent me down for grub to meet you on my first train. And you took the kisses so there can never be another picture."

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE REPULSE

No more did Arda hear Halford's whistle, in fact she believed that he was more sober and solemn than the desolate north. He was getting lonely. Often he stood in front of the cabin and looked eagerly, wistfully toward the east as if spanning great distances.

It had taken five generations to make the Chase pride and twenty-two years to temper the steel armor about his tender heart. After that day in the snow Arda believed he was diligently gathering up the shattered fragments to set them into place again. She watched his every movement with growing dismay, and every vibration of the face which seldom turned to her was a beacon of far-away hope. She was apprehensive, not only for Halford but for her own future. He had said he did not love Alice, but he was going back.

The caribou had been brought from the snow, and winter set in. Arda soon began to walk about, winter crept snail-like into bitter cold and the snow piled deep and lingered into spring. Then came the sunny days of April and the white blanket began to settle down. Each night Arda went to her room and fastened the door with a wooden lock, with growing dismay.

It was one night in the spring that Halford stepped to her room. "That is your door, Halford," she said with bitter repulse. He turned away and heard the wooden lock drop into place. When she arose in the morning Halford was sitting on a block of wood beside the cabin in the sun, deep in thought and meditation. For a week he watched the melting snows with restless anticipation. His somber meditation told her of what he was thinking.

She went to the ridge over which they had entered to the camp. The ground was now warm, and spring flowers were strewn about among the rocks. She was gathering them as she went and a song was on her lips, clear, full of love and passion. He listened and the words came clear on the breeze from the ridge up which she was climbing to the lookout that held a view for many miles about.

"Not though man's answered the call of the mate  
Sent to him dancing out over the lake  
From city or wild;  
Not though she's read it a flame on his face,  
Will woman relinquish, and fall from her place,  
A name for her child."

The song coming to him on the repulse of a few nights before told of the purity of her heart and the strange code of the north. Soon the notes died away as she went up the ridge, her hair whipping about her shoulders. He looked wistfully after her, but his picture, if he had one, was still in the east. Yet there was a conflict in his heart, an emotion that he could not fight back.

Getting up from the block of wood he wended his

way after her up to the lookout. He had never been there and he wanted to stand on the pinnacle for a clear view of Arda's world. He pushed on, and could see her skirt and brown locks waving in the wind that swept for many miles. Now the pinnacle came to be "Arda's lookout."

It was a wistful gaze that held the sunset face; it told that she knew what was in his thoughts. Her mackinaw buttoned about her breast, she was scanning the distant horizon for something she could not find, now to the west, then to the south down a timbered valley. The peaks ran into the interminable distance and settled out of view.

"You have come to tell me, Halford." A plea was in the sunset.

"Yes, Little Sunset. It has come very hard to tell you, very hard, little girl, but it's best for me. I wanted one view of your world, a great big world it is, too, from your viewpoint. May I look at it with you?"

She moved to the side of the rock on which she sat.

"Little Sunset, I wish I could see it with your eyes, just once, oh, just once, then I would never go! I am afraid I shall miss so much."

"Then you would never go away and leave it, Halford."

"I really wish I was going to stay. I have lingered for a month already, debating with myself, just what I am going to do with you, my Little Sunset. To leave you here seems so ungrateful, like deserting everything that makes life worth living. Won't you go with me where I can have some one

to look after you, where I may come to see you sometimes?"

Her sharp little eyes flashed an accusation across his face.

"You think I can't look after myself. That I would want you to come — sometimes. No, Halford, I thought you was my mate, but now I want you to go back to her. Don't worry about me, Halford." Her gaze was steady, strange into almost a cruel expanse of waste.

"Little Sunset, I wouldn't mind it so much if it was any place but here. It is so lonely, so wild and pitiless, to look into for a future — with all hope gone."

"But I will have the picture, Halford, and it is all finished now. I lived here many years with only the eyes and the smile and the heart throbs; now I have it all. I know I have the throbs even though you go, Halford." Something like a smile went into the sunset sky.

"I believe they will always be with you, Little Sunset, but it is best for me to go. And my going, my going back to her will not darken the picture?" he asked.

"I couldn't let it, Halford, for there can never be another picture now; you have taken the kisses that gives me the right ever to have another. The picture is all I get." He felt reprehensible; a mist gathered on the dim scene, to narrow the distances of the broad expanse from the lookout. How unselfish she was!

"Gods, Little Sunset, you make it awful hard for me to go, for me to say good-by," he said, not daring

to meet one look from the innocent, pleading eyes. There was nothing of the primitive in her veins, nothing of the wilderness or the wildness of it, just the simplicity of it all gathered out of the broken expanse. " You don't understand why I must go, Little Sunset, why I must not forsake my life, my responsibilities for the future. They are waiting for me, they need me. My father clings to the hope of my return. Circumstances have placed you and me so very far apart."

" Yet we found each other, Halford."

It was hard for him to deny that this girl was his mate. He felt her every passion, every motive, her very being within him, the sympathy of souls had some connecting link that he could not sever. Yet he knew he must go and leave her here to the desolation after the simplicity, the love, the passion, the innocence he had awakened within her. He wished he had never turned his back on the crowded East. Many of his words must have given her hope. He wished he could recall them all, but they came out in his own struggle for happiness. She had never missed one expressive word that came on his eager gaze. She knew he loved her, yet she knew he was going.

" I shall come up here and watch you go, Halford." She lifted up her trembling hand and pointed down the long valley reaching far away. " See the narrow valley reaching off there to the sun? It extends for seventy miles along your trail. Red Lightning will take you and then each day I shall come back up here and watch and watch."

" For me, Little Sunset? "

She shook those brown locks. "Just to hope, Halford. You will never come back."

"Little Sunset, how are you going to get grub, when this is gone? How are you going to provide for yourself? Let me send you money when I get back."

"You think I would take it away from her? No, Halford, maybe I can get along here; perhaps you might need me some day mor'n I need you now. No, Halford, I am not your mate; you're going away from my nest and I can't take things from you, not one little thing."

Halford buried his face in his hands, for something was convulsing in his breast. Memory of her might come to haunt him sometime and he would need her. He felt that she would always have a sacred and a jealous place in his heart.

"Let us go back, Little Sunset. Let us not look at your world any longer; it's beginning to crowd me, hurt me; let us go." He took her hands and lifted her up. With an effort he resisted the temptation to take her in his arms. "Little Sunset, you have taught me how to live, how to love."

"I've had you one winter for it, Halford."

"What if I should come back?"

"You never will, Halford. It's in your blood; you never will, but you can't take my picture."

They walked on slowly down the ridge.

"Red Lightning will come tomorrow?"

"Yes."

They went on side by side. What a brave little heart she had! He knew how she loved him; he had seen it in her eyes, in every movement; all was the same, now he was going.

## CHAPTER XVII

### GOOD-BY

It was not until Halford commenced his preparations for the journey home that Arda tempered her heart for the parting. Red Lightning was standing in front of the cabin, his copper, savage face aglow with the primitive, his straight black hair hanging down his back, watching with sinister gaze. He understood what this separation meant to one of the two, at least, and if he had any loyalty in him, it was Arda's in this world. She was calm until Halford went out of the cabin to where Red Lightning was holding his two visible-ribbed ponies which he had brought from the meadows thirty miles away at Arda's request. A mist had gathered in Arda's eyes as she stood watching Halford tie his grub-bag to his saddle. He was leaving the rifle but his six-shooter hung at his side.

When he turned to say good-by the tumult, her appealing, wistful gaze was more than he could resist. He took her in his arms and lifted her full off the ground and kissed her many times while she clung to him.

"Take them all, Halford, dear mate. I saved them for you. They all belong to you."

The scene made Red Lightning's face distort revengefully, cruel and sinister. It was not until Hal-

ford felt tears in his own eyes that he set her down and mounted quickly to end the tumult. He rode away to prevent his heart from bleeding more. Red Lightning followed and soon took the lead. On the crest of the ridge Halford turned back for a parting glance. She was coming up the hill on her way to the lookout as she had said she would. Far down the grassy slope Halford turned again. Arda was now climbing the ridge to the pinnacle to watch him go. A mist gathered in his eyes and he dare not turn again, but followed Red Lightning down the mountainside into the long, narrow creek bottom leading to the distant summit that would close out Arda's world forever. Several times a tempting thought came to turn him back, but still he kept on. He felt the pain of it, the loneliness of it all.

"If she were only different, if the distance between us were not so great," his heart kept repeating over and over. "But how would I want her different?" He could find no answer as he rode listlessly on. He looked into the distance and began to mould those shattered fragments of steel about his heart.

Red Lightning was well-named. Arda had named him. His small, dark eyes flashed with that treacherous Indian blood known the world over, and he fancied he understood what the parting with the girl had meant. This pale face was deserting Little Sun-face, casting her off, throwing her down into the northern dust.

Red Lightning refused to speak English, so there were no words spoken on the journey, and Halford was left alone with his own meditations. Arda had told Red Lightning that he was to take Halford to

the railroad and then come back and report to her in person of his welfare. The second night Halford and his silent guide camped at the foot of the mountain visible from the lookout. Halford fancied he could see Arda's eyes watching from the distant peak in a silent guard over him. The threatening, bullet-like eyes of the guide penetrated across the dim light of the camp-fire, ever upon him, disturbing, threatening, sullen, closed out the vision of her far away.

It was the fifth day that a somber gray mist obscured the sun and Halford followed the silent guide without sense of direction. They came to a broad plain, a plateau, looking down into it from the rim of the mountain where they stood. Forty miles to the west the glistening caps of peaks rose out of the level expanse; the grassy plain was cut with innumerable river fingers. Halford had seen nothing like this on the way to the nest with Arda, and he made his complaint, but Red Lightning made no answer but started down the mountain. This day Halford followed Red Lightning's inauspicious advance with misgiving. The eastern ring of mountains rounded to the south and the plateau was ringed in by a glittering barrier. From this plain Halford watched the dimming day. For an hour he watched the glistening of the snows on the distant summits stand out against the eerie, ashy sky. They made camp late that night by a small creek much like many others which they had crossed. Always a chilly wind swept the plateau. The expanse was untimbered save for here and there a clump of willows. Gathering a few dry twigs they made a fire and at nine Halford lay down to sleep, rolling in his blanket. Red Lightning

was watching with his penetrating eyes like a watcher out of the night, and in his gaze was a flash of fire.

When Halford awoke in the morning still the murky canopy hung over the plateau and forced back the sun. He made a cursory search for the horses, but they were nowhere in sight. He jumped to his feet. Red Lightning had evidently gone after them, for he had left the wallowed grass under his bed. Halford started up the elevation to the east from the creek for a view. It was a half mile away, though it had looked but a few rods from the camp. From the low-lying hill his eyes shot over the distances to the barriers of the mountains with a swift glance. He had no idea which way Red Lightning had gone in his search for the horses. He looked for horse tracks in the plain. He could see where the grass had been broken down and nipped off, with the weight of moving hoofs, but there were no distinct imprints in the tufted sod. The grass was about a foot high. With a steady gaze he ringed the horizon. To the east he saw two black specks on the slope of the distant hill. He watched for the third, which would have told him that Red Lightning was in pursuit. The horses had evidently wandered far. It must be two miles to where they were and seeing that Red Lightning must have gone in the opposite direction Halford set out over the grassy slope. The horses were ranging rapidly away from him almost as fast as his pursuit, and he quickened his pace, often breaking into a dog-trot. Still they were headed direct for the northeast, he imagined from the occasional brightening in the murky sky which told of the probable location of the sun rising over

the eastern hills. The two black specks grew larger until they passed over the crest of the low-lying hill out of view. Two hours had gone by. The hills rose and fell in easy, almost imperceptible grades from one creek to another, and he discovered that their slopes were much longer than he had at first thought. The clear atmosphere was filled with microscopic lenses that made the effect elusive. Finally he looked at his watch and was startled at the discovery that it was after nine o'clock; but the horses were now plain to view, and there was no use returning to camp without them. Red Lightning had gone in the wrong direction, and his finding them filled him with a sort of pride. They were now grazing behind a clump of willows. He ran closer under the concealment of the brushwood. Strange how they had strayed so far, but the distances, the gradual roll of the hills were so elusive they had wandered without knowing how far they went. The effect had been the same upon him; he would almost liken it to the elusive mirage effect of the desert.

Soon he discovered that the beasts he was following were not horses at all, but two wandering caribou making their way across the meadow basin, feeding occasionally and leisurely as they went. For a moment he was filled with desperation, a trembling fear which he overcame with an effort. What a fool he had been; he ought to have known that Red Lightning, with his primitive instincts, would know which way to go. He was doubtless waiting for him now at the camp, wondering what had become of him.

He looked at his watch. It was noon. He gave an anxious start and climbed the hill. He must

hurry, or the day would be lost, and they would cover little of the distance to the southern rim of the basin which he concluded must have been in primitive times an inland lake which had been drained by the wearing of a gap in the circling ring of mountains. He doubtless had come ten miles, perhaps much farther.

From the top of the hill he looked down where the camp must be. No horses or Red Lightning caught his eye. They were doubtless over the *next* hill. How *long* the slopes were! He ought to have eaten his breakfast before starting out, at least; but he had been too anxious to get out on the trail. He was hungry. Halford hurried on over the next hill and still no horses or Red Lightning caught his tired vision. He tried to count the creeks he had crossed. There were at least three; yes, at least three. He kept on, and in every scene was silence, unspecked by life. Yes, Red Lightning would be out hunting for him by this time. He expected to see him any moment coming over the crest of the deceptive hills. He must have gone much faster, much farther than he thought in his eagerness, in the freshness and vigor of the early morning hours.

He had now crossed three creeks. It was three o'clock and soon it was four, and before he reached the next hill it was five. A desperation filled him and he stopped for a moment to consider. Would Red Lightning wait for him? The black eyes of day, the almost red glowing eyes of night, came to him over the camp-fire as if out of the night. They had held something that he could not fathom, something that left a tremor, a fear, then a haunting fear. Red Lightning might leave him in his treacherous anger.

Yet he argued that Little Sunset would not have sent him if he were not to be trusted.

Yes, Red Lightning would wait. He was crazy to have gone out in search of the horses, however. When night closed in he had not found camp. He lay down in desperation to wait for the light of another day to guide him on, hoping for a sun to point out directions. He cursed Red Lightning for taking a new and shorter trail to the railroad. He gathered a few willows and built a fire in hope that Red Lightning would see the glow of it and come to him, but he did not. Halford Chase did not sleep that night. It slipped away with growing hunger and despair.

As soon as he could penetrate into the growing light he was up, but now his eyes were glassy, staring, ringed with a rim of white. Yes, Red Lightning would wait for him; he was compelled to think this or give up hope, so he searched all that day, often running, generally out of breath, frequently compelled to rest. There was no sign of life on the broad plateau. It was the third day that he gave up hope that Red Lightning was waiting for him. Yes, he would have found him before this. Yet he must, at least, find the grub-pack to allay his hunger pangs; then the thought came that Red Lightning must have taken the grub-pack with him. He trembled, he brushed his hand across his eyes to clear his tired vision. It was all plain to him now, Red Lightning had gone the morning he had started for the horses. He lurched on. If he had only thought to buckle his pistol about him he could go direct to the mountains where he could kill enough game to keep him alive

on the way south, always south until he reached the Canadian Pacific. There was no use going to the mountains without his gun. He could never reach across the two, perhaps three, hundred miles without food. He must find his gun. For three days he searched, then realised how futile it would be. The grub-pack if left there would only be a speck in the concealing grass, invisible from a distance, and now every scene was the same. Yes, Red Lightning had left him, deserted him to die with slow starvation. Hunger pangs were augmenting his desperation, his mind went vaporlike, he tried to calm himself and keep back the visions that crossed in front of him, tantalizing him. Soon the hallucinations were more frequent and assumed various forms, tempting him, then cruelly eluding him. Once he saw a table filled with food, all that could be piled upon it; he smiled, a ghastly, hideous smile; he ran toward it and just as he was about to reach for a bannock it vanished. Then he was by a camp-fire and a frying-pan was sputtering over the fire and he could smell a savory odor of caribou steak.

He had reached to his side the hundredth time for his gun, and now he could feel it hanging there hitting against his hip as a bull caribou stepped out from behind a willow. It was a mammoth beast and as he reached for his gun, startled by his presence, it ran across the meadow and vanished like a shadow.

Soon hope, reason, purpose failed him and he went aimlessly about; yet visions still came. He stopped at the first creek and searched for fish. It was a small stream, but the fish were filling the bottom by

the hundreds. All sizes, the large ones eating the smaller ones, which darted into their very mouths in their efforts to escape. He sat down on the bank and made a hook out of a pin, and tied it to a stick in hope of snaring one of the smaller ones, they were so numerous. Then, when he put the hook into the water, they swam away and only a shiny bottom came up to him. For the twentieth time he withdrew his snare for them to gather, but they were always frightened away when it struck the water. Always as he looked into the mirroring water his own hideous grimace made him start back. For several hours he made futile efforts to capture even a single fish, but always they evaded him.

Soon he began to wander without purpose, now he must find another place where the fish were not so wild. The mountains which had ringed in the plateau had sunken out of view, leveled across the skyline. Soon he came to a small eddy near the creek which was filled with fish. He worked for two hours damming the entrance from the creek. He was certain he could catch one with his hands before they could all get away. As he stepped into the pond they leaped over the dam he had made like sheep over a pair of bars, and several slipped between his eager fingers. He tried again and then again at other eddys, but every effort was the same.

Soon he met a frog and pursued it greedily, but every time he bent down to take it in his grasp it jumped into the grass, and was making direct for the creek. He got down on his hands and knees and pursued it, but always it jumped from under his hand

as he was about to capture it. Soon it reached the creek and concealed itself under the overhanging meadow grass.

His hallucinations changed from one hope to another with no consistent purpose. The nights on the meadow grass were but a flicker of fading light to another day, filled with dreams, and visions of mountains of food. Often, very often now he saw Little Sunset, coming over the hill, and jumping up to run to her, only night forced him back. Strange, he never thought of Alice, but she was far away and could not help him; no, she would not leave her couch to come to him.

"I knew you would come, Little Sunset; I knew you would come. You didn't know. It was Red Lightning who did it. It's the devil in Red Lightning that did it. You will kill him, won't you, Little Sunset, for taking your mate?" He never condemned her once for the misfortune that had befallen him. Always the night forced back the visions and he kept on crawling, snake-like, through the meadow grass. Once he saw Arda in the very act of taking Red Lightning's life. He was watching, laughing, exulting, cheering her on. It was a desperate struggle, but Red Lightning finally fell. Then, as she was about to turn to him, the scene vanished.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE CREEPING MAN

Arda was watching from the lookout, where she had gone each day to watch for the return of Red Lightning. She knew that he would not return for many days, but still she could not resist the temptation of watching across the waste. Thinking that Halford had not believed that the officer was really in search of him she feared he might go direct to Fish Lake and get into difficulties. She was ready to go at once upon Red Lightning's return, to help him.

It was the tenth day and long before she expected him to return that he came up the ridge out of the timber. Arda went down the hill from the lookout to meet him with alarm in her heart.

"What brings you back so soon, Red Lightning?" she asked with a flash in her accusing eyes.

Red Lightning jumped from his horse with a treacherous, hideous laugh disturbing the copper face.

"What have you done?" she demanded, with a fierce stare from her condemning eyes.

"White man walk like a bear. White man jump like a frog," he said, imitating the thought he wished to convey, then his laughter rang like metal on the cool breeze.

"Red Lightning, tell me quick before I kill you, what have you done with Halford? Have you killed him?" She reached down for her own gun.

"Sunface no kill Red Lightning," he said. "I see all when white man leave. Sunface get left behind when white man go away. I see into Sunface's eyes. He throw her down, put a big foot on her, and she mad with white man. Sunface mad with him like kill, cause white man no love her and go away."

"What have you done?" She drew her .45 and pointed it at Red Lightning with anger and fear.

Again the metal of his soul rang, the Indian devil in him echoing with laughter.

"I take white man to Caribou Meadows; he soon walk like a bear and he jump like a frog, then he wish he not desert Sunface and soon he walk and jump no more."

"You have left Halford there to starve, to die. Red Lightning, I will kill you if you have killed Halford. You take me to him and if he is dead, Red Lightning, I will leave you dead there also."

The Indian in the savage quaked; he saw the flash of death through his sulky soul. She hurried down to the cabin and was soon ready for the trail.

"Understand, Red Lightning, if he dies, I will kill you. You must find him alive." He nodded his head, and they turned back over the ridge.

"Me find white man," he said.

The grub-pack was tied to Arda's horse and the tepee tent to Red Lightning's. They went down the ridge, urging their horses on as rapidly as possible.

The Indian blood in him made him very eager, for he knew the girl's threat was made in earnest. She

would kill him if he failed. The fourth day they were on the rim of Caribou Meadows, for they had traveled very rapidly. The Indian had often caught the flash across Arda's face. They never spoke, which was indeed threatening for Red Lightning's welfare.

"He has very likely gone out of the meadows by this time, to the south," said Arda apprehensively, looking across the plain. Hope sank very low for the vast expanse was threatening. "You go to the right, Red Lightning, and search for his trail, and remember the penalty if you fail. I will ride the meadows."

It was early morning and he started down the mountain and along the rim of the meadows and was soon out of view. On Light Foot Arda went across the meadows toward the opposite mountain forty miles away. Her eyes went searchingly from every elevation for a movement on the rolling waves of meadow grass. For three days she searched in desperation from early dawn until night closed out a view. Light Foot was weakening under the incessant toil and haste.

One summer her father had panned every foot of the meadows for placer, and her knowledge of the country served her well. One evening as she went over an elevation a strange scene confronted her. Looking down to the creek she saw a black figure in the grass sitting on the bank of the creek. A willow pole was in his hands and in the manner of one fishing he would give a quick jerk and his head would go up as if watching the arc of a flying fish. Then, dropping his pole, he would crawl through the

meadow grass in search for the fish. Soon he would go back and repeat the drama.

She hurried to him. He met her with a wild, demented stare in his eyes and his face was distorted with a hideous smile, seeming to oscillate between absolute hope and complete dismay.

Her father had once told her of finding a starved man in the musk-ox country of the Mackenzie, and she knew that she must be very careful. The tepee tent was set up and Halford was taken into it with a quaint realization that at last Little Sunset had heard him; the vision had come true. He had called and she had answered. She gave him a morsel of food, then went out and hid the grub-pack from him in fear that he might search for it and a swift end would come. Two days later Red Lightning found them together. The Indian's very presence made him delirious with anger and hatred, so the savage was compelled to camp over a hill alone. From the mountains he brought grouse, and one day a quarter of a yearling caribou.

"I knew you would come, Little Sunset. Your eyes are like the eagle's and your wings like the dove's; you see very far and fly swiftly. Yes, I knew you would come."

For three weeks they remained in Caribou Meadows. When Halford was strong enough to ride he was given Light Foot and Arda rode Red Lightning's horse, while the Indian walked behind, much to his dislike. It took six days to reach the nest, and yet his strength had not fully returned. Often they were compelled to linger beside a creek or in a meadow for him to rest. They never found the six-

shooter at the last camping place where Red Lightning had deserted him, for it was but a speck in the concealment of the tall meadow grass.

The recovery was slow and left Halford shattered in mind and in body. Few words had passed between him and Little Sunset. Often he sat in the sun watching the hills, Little Sunset's mountains, as if debating with them, but what their words were she could only judge by the set, grim features, as if he were repentant under an accusation. She seldom disturbed him, for his going had left an abyss, across which he must come to her.

He was sitting one evening on a block of wood beside the cabin. Arda had watched him for many minutes then she went to him and sank down with very eager, longing eyes turned up to him. A smile cut his face, soothing to its hardness.

"I didn't do it, Halford, I didn't do it."

"No, Little Sunset. I saw your face often out there those many days. I know you didn't do it. Did Red Lightning tell you?" He put his hand on her head caressingly and looked across the waste.

"Yes, Halford. Red Lightning saw, he understood those last few moments before you went. I could not conceal it, Halford; but even then I wanted you to go back to her and be happy."

"I have been thinking ever so long about just the problem that provoked Red Lightning's treachery." He drew her head down to him and looked into the desolation with indecision. For ten minutes she waited for him to speak.

"Halford, you wish to go again, you want me to take you?" she said. The color had not come

back to his face, the cheeks were haggard and the eyes had lost the keen determination, part of their luster.

"It was primitive punishment for leaving you, the primitive against the modern. You don't know what a fight I have had, always. My ambitions have always been different from what they wanted them to be. It took them twenty-two years to make me yield. That armour was shattered. It took a will of steel to temper my heart to their way of thinking, now it seems a part of me. I have built upon pride, a Chase pride that has never been disputed. Little Sunset, something out there told me you were my mate, but I have been fighting it back, I am fighting it now, with all the determination of a will of steel."

"You must go, Halford," she said, trembling.

"I want you, Little Sunset, but twenty-two years are calling me out of the past, they are tempting me, they are accusing me, they are jeering, ridiculing me for what I am thinking now. I want you, I want you, yet the life back there also. I want my ambition and you with it."

It did not appear to him that he could take this girl back with him, the thought had never occurred to him, the two lives were so very far apart. "It seemed that he must give up one or the other."

"Oh, Halford, *go back!* You can decide back there, better than here. You think I need you, I make you think something you might come to regret. It's sympathy for me, Halford, not love. You must go back." She searched his face as if seeking a denial, but none came. Still he clung to her and would not let her rise.

"No, Little Sunset, it isn't that. It's just between you and them, this life and that. If I could only take you back with me —"

"But you couldn't?" She looked quickly to his face for answer, a tumult rising in her breast. Her heart was crying, "Take me, Halford, take me if you love me, Halford, if I am your mate. You shall never be ashamed of me, Halford, even where they are." Still he did not answer. She waited tense and rigid.

"No, I couldn't take you to them."

She sank back. "Let us go in, Halford. It's getting cold."

He held her to him as they walked to the door as if jealous of possession. "No, he could not take her back and he was afraid to go down to the foot of the ladder and carry her up. If he returned home it must be Alice, as he had promised, so the Chase Manufacturing Company could have a help-mate, the Diamond Mill Company.

A week went by and still Halford lingered at the nest, as thoughtful as ever.

Arda was standing in the door looking up the trail where he had gone more than a month ago. He slipped up behind her and caught her up in his arms and kissed her many times. An exultation went over her. He had won his battle. "Halford, oh, Halford — don't — Halford." But he held her until she lay helpless in his arms.

"Oh, Halford, are you my mate, after all?"

"Yes, Little Sunset."

"Am I your mate, Halford?"

"Yes, Little Sunset."

"Oh, Halford, are you going to stay?"

"Yes; you are mine and they can't rob me of you, Little Sunset." He carried her to a chair and held her to him and planned a way to take the gold out of the lake. They planned many buildings together, a city of their own here in the desolation. A long tunnel through the rocks would drain the lake and a hydraulic from the creek at the face of the mountain would wash the gold into the sluice boxes and they would be rich together. She clung to him for more than two hours, until after midnight. When they had taken out all the gold they would go away together.

To the girl it seemed like a dream of which she was soon to be robbed.

"Are you sure, Halford, dead sure, I'm your mate?"

"Yes, Little Sunset, sure."

"And you are taking me for your mate now, Halford, for always and for always?" she asked.

He kissed her again and whispered to her.

"Yes, Little Sunset, I am taking you as your father took your mother far away, up on the Mackenzie."

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE CHILD WITHOUT A NAME

"Have you got the buckskin sack I gave you when you went away, Halford?" asked Arda with her most tempting smile.

"But you told me not to open it until I got back to Multnoma, so, Little Sunset, the buckskin sack is a sacred thing and I can never know what you gave me to remember you by."

"Would you have remembered me, Halford, when you got there, or would you let them crowd me right out." While she was not cajoling, Halford Chase found it very difficult to resist her. He was enjoying her from the standpoint of looking into her pleasant, pleading eyes.

"Remembering would not have been the worst, Little Sunset. You would have haunted memory, always," he assured her in his most convincing mood.

"Maybe the buckskin sack I gave you would have helped to do it. Now, Halford, look at me straight, and say you would like all over to see what is in the sack made of buckskin." He met her gaze squarely and it blended in a thrill of emotion that always came at such moments.

"I would like to know, but you said never until I got back to Multnoma."

"Are you going to make me stick right tight to

everything I said? I want you to look into it now. Won't you, Halford, do it for me?" The smile sank into a pitiful plea that was irresistible.

"Irresistible Little Sunset! Won't you have any mystery hang between us at all? I wanted that as a starting point for our futures, Little Sunset, a thought to which I could revert often and glide down into the years in memory of you."

"No mystery, since I'm your mate, Halford."

He got the buckskin sack, and fifteen beautiful gold nuggets dropped to the table. His eyes stared at them in surprise, then a smile went to her.

"They sure would have held first place in my memory for you always. They would have pranced me right back to the sunset, had I opened the sack in Multnoma. I would never have let a single soul see them for fear of exciting a stampede into the west and the city might have been deserted. Have you got any more of them, Little Sunset?"

"For no one but you. I know where there's heaps of them, dear mate. I been saving them all for my mate, now they are yours. We shall go next spring and get the money to drain the lake."

Halford's brow knit, a cloud went across his face. Until this moment he would not have admitted that he was remaining here out of any consideration for her but love. A realization now came that duty, pity, had influenced him at least to some extent, a feeling that he had been deceived, that he was not needed here, that his life was being purchased. "So you didn't need me at all, Little Sunset. You could have gotten along without me."

"Course I needed you. I need you to help get

them and help carry them." She was jubilant, happy and she danced about the room in her exultation while Halford watched the lithe, lissome movements, the grace of the desolation in every bend and line. She was like the willow, the willow that grows in the desolation that bends to every breeze gently; wailing, fierce in the tumult. No one would ever have said that Arda was unable to withstand the storm even though she bent at the slightest touch.

One evening he was sitting by the table reading one of the few books he had found in her father's room. She went to him and threw her arms about his neck. The winter was at its coldest and the sun was very low on the rim of the horizon, yet this night her heart was very warm; but one thing made it tremble.

"Halford, I want you to promise me something."

He looked up from the book and his thoughts were far away, but at her summons they came hurrying back. "What is it, Little Sunset?"

"I want you to write down ten names each day—five girl names and five boy names—as long as you can think of a new one."

"What, Arda?" He turned to her quickly and a flash went over him.

"Then some day, Halford, I want you to select the very nicest one of all." Something vibrated in her throat to close out words when this thought ended.

"Do you mean that, Arda, that we shall have to find a name?"

"Oh, Halford, why ain't you happy instead of

angry the way you be. I thought you would be happy." She clung to him as it is the duty to cling to the mate at such a moment. His face went unseeing to the night-curtained window which turned back the far-away look in his eyes.

"Are you sure, Arda?"

"It's true. I been waiting so it wouldn't be a disappointment to you, Halford, and you don't like it, because it's me. It ain't just because you wanted just me, Halford, always. What makes you look so terrible at the window, just as if you were trying to gather up all the darkness and the night to hurl upon me, Halford?" Had it not been for fear and apprehension she would have cried bitterly but his sudden recoiling from her made her burn with fevered brain.

Still his eyes were set against the black repulse of the window and he refused to turn to her.

She set a pencil and paper before him. "Won't you write them down, Halford? I will bring the paper and pencil each night?"

"No. We shall have one ready when the time comes," he said gruffly. Arda understood the meaning of Halford's indifference.

Then came the anxious days for her. Each day she told him a story of the wilderness.

"Halford, did you ever hear about the faithful rabbit?"

"No."

"It made a hole where it lived, just as we have a nest way up here in the mountains, in the north. One day came three little rabbits, and while the old mother was out getting something to eat a fox came

along and give chase to the rabbit, who couldn't get home because the fox could run the fastest and kept driving her on. Finally the rabbit found another hole where she had lived the year before, and she ran into it to save her life.

"'All right,' said the fox, 'I know where your babies are, I will go and get them for my dinner.' The rabbit was scared half to death, and, after thinking for a moment, knowing how proud the fox was on account of the way he could dig, said, 'I thought you was so good digging holes; why don't you get me, I can't dig very fast.' The mother rabbit laughed jeeringly. 'Want to catch babies that can't protect themselves, do you?' This was more accusing than the fox could stand, and he set about digging. The mother rabbit scratched on the sides of the hole until the fox was far underground, to make believe she was afraid of her life and was digging with all her strength. When the fox was down deep in the ground, the rabbit ran out the other end of the hole and went to her babies and took them to a hole in the rocks where no fox could dig to get them."

Halford's brow clouded, for it was the same kind of story she had told for many nights, all pointing toward that one disturbing subject, faithfulness to the young.

The next night she told him of the robin tempting the hawk away from the tree where the three little birds were in the nest underneath. Halford listened to them in silence and with growing contempt. All this was far from pleasing to him, rather did it harden his heart instead of softening it. The five generations of jealous pride and the twenty-two

years of imperious vanity were convulsing rebelliously under the tender touch of his soul; the accumulated past was drawing the shattered steel like a magnet about the eager heart. Never has a revolution been won in two years, rather is the conflict at its fiercest, yet the throne of past generations was tottering under a most cruel punishment and conflict. Two years were not long enough to win a heart's revolt against the crown of five generations and twenty-two years.

That the Chase name should be desecrated by a child who would grovel it in the dust was a repulse. The law for five generations and twenty-two years had been that it took a church and a clergy to give a paternal name. No, the child would be nameless. He would not tempt five generations of Chases to rise up in their quiet sleep, with fingers of scorn pointed at him.

From the room where her father had slept he resurrected a map of the north country and was pouring over it, tracing a trail down to the railroad when Arda approached him.

"You are going, Halford,—now?" The tremor in her voice did not affect the steel in his heart.

"When the child is born." He continued to trace the blue line that went south.

"And leave us, Halford?" she pled.

"You will have a companion of your own blood." His voice came with the same ring as the whistle. She walked across the rough floor and then came back to him and watched the finger ever tracing south.

"I ought to have known from the first. It's

in your blood. The whistle you provoked Freddy with don't care, just don't care, still you don't care. Your life was made to order and you can't forsake it or rise above it." She spoke as if to herself, an accusation for the mistake she had made, the love that was too great and trusting in her breast.

"Rather, you mean, sink below it." Still his finger ran over the blue trail on the map.

"Not to sink below it, except to take all I had to give, then to hurl it back upon me and the child." Her voice went into the distance as if accusing the world instead of the man before her.

"Make it plain, Arda; stole, you mean, with your consent. You told me the kisses were mine. It's part of the rules to take everything of value, that is offered, when it pleases you to take." He was struggling hard, very hard to justify the thoughts within him.

"Even honor, even after you said I was your mate, Halford, even after you took me as my mother was taken, the mother whom I do not remember." Was this Halford speaking now, or was it the cherished five generations and twenty-two years groaning in their silent graves, in mastery over the living? This nettled him.

"Because you had it to give and to throw away. It pleased my fancy to accept. The law of society could have made it honor on my part also, but you chose the other course — disgrace."

"You don't recognize God's law, the law of love, the law that would rather give than to receive, trusting as my mother did in honor always." She had seated herself now and was watching him intently.

Halford turned upon her. She was taunting his manhood.

"Why, we have more churches in Multnomah than you will ever see—"

"Where they cast in pairs without regard to God's immortal decree of love." The sunset he had once seen was dimming on the very gloomy, desperate edge of night. It would soon plunge into darkness, the abyss beyond the rim of day with no promise for to-morrow.

"I suppose you think these trees are temples," he hurled at her. "Get married under them as often as you like. Let your heathen, primitive god perform the ceremony and tie the silly knot of honor, or disgrace. I was christened in the most sacred temple of Multnomah and my name is still on the roll of membership there. You have no name." Still her voice rang in unruffled tones, but sharp and piercing. It was well that Halford Chase did not challenge her to the open to-day as once he had done. There was no tremble in her voice now.

"There is where you saw, God, was it, Halford? You haven't seen him here, you haven't heard him speak, you haven't felt his touch. No, Halford, I guess the God of the north wouldn't touch you. His seventh day of rest was made because he had grown tired, very tired hoping for such souls as yours. I guess he turned the world loose on his rest day and it isn't over yet. I guess you haven't seen him or heard him, or felt him at all. You think he is calling you back to your temple to tell you what a little devil I was to believe you when you told me I was your mate. While He's sleeping

and resting on his seventh long day, He's just simply delegated your god to make new rules of the game. You cast men and women in pairs and promises make no difference, just the form you go through with. Say, Halford, when God awakes to go to work on this world again, after abandoning us so long, and he sees how things have been going, do you think he is going to approve all them forms and casting in pairs and false promises and taking honor under them and leaving the children for their mothers to give names to? It wasn't meant for a man to be bound by his own blood, just woman. Yes, Halford, I'm bound and I'm not going to desert my child for any self-delegated god that only goes to temples."

She spoke half to herself as if in a dream, a prayer. Halford Chase was now pacing the floor under a repetition of that revolt the day he had challenged her to the open, and she had come back wounded and dying. But now the armour was only shattered steel and the rending did not require so hard a blow.

"I guess I better tell you where the trail is, Halford, so you can go." He bent over the map with her.

"Take this blue line trail to the west, and just under the mountain you can see down the creek from the lake, you will find Red Lightning's rancheree and the meadow. To the south of the meadows you will find his blazed trail leading to the Chilco trail which we would have followed had I not saved you from the fifteen years in prison."

"Bah! A pretty excuse." She did not deny the accusation.

"You can't miss the way, Halford. The way I

came is shorter, but there is no trail. You better not follow back the way I come because the God of the north wouldn't guide you down it, He just wouldn't do it, Halford."

The drama was ended, the curtain fell and neither reverted in thought to discuss the matter again. The snow line of spring crept up the mountain and Arda waited to be a mother. When Halford heard the tiny cry at her side he paced the floor of the cabin, he did not rest for three nights or days. What if Arda should die and leave the child with him? What a revenge for this girl of the sunset. He was haunted through the long night. But Arda had sworn not to desert the child of her blood.

"Halford," she called faintly.

He went to her. "You said you would give the child a name, Halford."

"It's yours, name it, it isn't mine."

"You can't accuse me of that, Halford." A flash went through her eyes and he dare not meet it.

"There is no law making it mine."

She searched his hard face for many moments. She could not realize his meaning. Her primitive instincts had told her a more honorable code.

"Not even your honor, Halford. Won't you give the child your name?"

Five generations of Chases groaned and the whole world seemed to tremble with convulsions of wounded pride.

"Not when it's yours." He rose and left the room.

"I guess you'd better go, Halford, right away."

And she turned her face to the walls of the cabin.  
"It's the way they do where you come from, is it?  
The bears don't do it, the wolves don't desert their  
young until they are old enough to protect  
themselves."

Ten days after this his pack straps were thrown over his shoulders. Arda followed him to the open. He was trembling, but the steel of his heart supported him. She had the child in her arms.

"You ain't ever going to hold the child once, Halford?" she asked pleadingly. But he had started up the trail. She watched him go. No mist was in her eyes, she saw him clearly, as he whistled with that same metallic ring. The inevitable had happened and she was enduring it bravely. She was alone. There were no good-bys, no farewells. He went on up the slope. He gave a lurch, heaving his grub-pack high on his shoulders.

Soon a song came to her. As if for consolation for what he was doing he kept on.

'Tis the right of the man to call to the mate,  
To guide the skiff onward, over the lake,  
    Into its place;  
'Tis the right of the woman to answer the call;  
To make it herself, means only to fall  
    Into disgrace.

He soon sank out of view over the ridge and the notes died away.

Carrying the child. Arda went back into the lonely cabin, and lay the child down on the bed, sank down with a prayer.

"Oh, God of the north, God of the snows, God of

the forest, God of the wilderness, God of love, kind God, true kind God, save Halford, save him for his own sake from the idol, false god he worships."

Rising, she went to the kitchen and looked longingly at the silent walls as if to gather the words of happiness, and of love they held, but no echoes came out of the past. She was alone with the child.

## CHAPTER XX

### A DELAYED JOURNEY

Halford Chase, whiskers, armor, chaps and all hurried into the hotel at Fish Lake with the weight of three hundred miles of northern waste off his shoulders. He was far from being the Eastern dude of two years before. His cloths were patched and threadbare, and he made a typical picture of the dim horizon.

The landlord welcomed him with his usual curt manner.

"I wish to get my suit-case," said Halford with nervous haste, for his train would be creeping over the rails eastward in less than two hours.

"Your suit-case! You could never have left any luggage here," said the landlord in surprise. "With whom did you leave it? My son, perhaps. He left a week ago."

"With you, sir," said Halford impatiently. Then he recollect ed that two years had gone by, a change must have dimmed memory, a change that made him tremble. "Don't you remember, two years ago. Chase is my name. I was on my way to Harvey's and intended to return for it in about two months. I went north with Arda."

The landlord stared at him with startled eyes, brushing the webs from his memory. "Yes, Oh, yes. So you are Halford Chase. Got back all

right, did you? Thought you were dead. They been looking for you for months. Man from the east, Multnoma, I believe was here. Keen, dignified man of about fifty. I believe he said his name was Chase also."

"My father," gasped Halford. For a moment he was thoughtful, then apprehension came. He leaned over the counter. "But what about some one looking for me. Is that true about Freddy, his getting his hand shot and accusing me of doing it?" asked Halford in low tones. He looked about the office stealthily to make sure that no one was watching him.

"Give up finding you, Mr. Chase." A glance disturbed Halford. "Say, you better make yourself scarce about here. Where you been all this time? Ought not to have come back here," said the landlord cautiously.

"It's true then—about Freddy."

Blair nodded.

"For God's sake. Blair, don't say a thing about my coming. I knew nothing about Freddy being shot, not a thing, I swear it. I will take the train in these clothes and change on the way. Here is a five, Blair, for looking after my suit-case all this time and say, Blair, this is nothing to you, give me a room where I will stay until train time and bring me a lunch. I am as hungry as a coyote. More than three hundred miles on a rough trail. Walked every foot of the way. Feet are like boils."

Blair's glance was suspicious. He evidently did not believe all that Halford had told him, but the five made a difference.

"Thank you, Blair, for telling me about Freddy's affair and their looking for me. I better get out of the office before any one comes in. I don't believe any one recognized me."

"Take number 10, Mr. Chase."

Halford would liked to have talked with Blair more, but it would have been unwise. However, he cared but little that Jim Langborn had come down to look for Arda and to get more provision for the winter.

It was good to see activity again, life, the world, even the raw places. This was primitive enough for him, yet he felt that he was forcing back, battling the memory of the north, and what he had done. Yes his blood was there, human blood, entitled to a name, his name, yet the child must live with the handicap of birth. He did not even know whether it was a boy or a girl. He paced restlessly, anxiously, about his room, waiting for Blair to tell him that the east-bound train was coming. Already he had eaten his lunch and the moments were threatening, terribly slow in bringing the train.

He thought of his father's visit to the West in search of him. He had come, as he expected he would; he thought of Alice, wondering if she had shed a tear upon her pillow when Wellington Chase told her that he was missing and probably dead. How he would surprise them as if coming out of a sepulchre. A smile went over his face and lingered hopefully until he heard Blair's steps in the hall and then a rap on the door.

"Train is coming, Mr. Chase."

"Say, Blair, here is another dollar. Will you

carry my suit-case down to the train and put it into the day coach? I will find it. I will walk down the back way. I don't want to be seen carrying a grip with these clothes on. It might arouse suspicion."

Blair took the suit-case, but only a part of Halford took the east-bound that night, the glittering exterior that was safely put aboard by the landlord. In half an hour after the east-bound pulled out of Fish Lake Halford was saying, "This is some calaboose, officer."

"It is that, Mr. Chase," answered the officer, looking at the .45 he had taken from Halford's hip. It had once belonged to Arda's father.

"There are no notches on it. I got it in the north some time ago. Freddy had five notches on his gun and I was to be the sixth, but Freddy has changed his ways now. Revolutions in human hearts are quite out of the ordinary. Tell me, officer, why Freddy appealed to the law for settlement of this affair."

The officer smiled. "We know nothing about Freddy's notches. He claims you shot him in the hand in a deadly assault down by the lake, the day you left. We are giving you a chance to prove yourself innocent."

"So you give Freddy the benefit of the doubt and compel me to prove myself innocent. All Freddy has to do is set back and smile," said Halford jovially, walking into the room of the calaboose.

The officer squirmed. By some perverted rule they always presume the guilt of their victims and they are never conscious of that fact until they are accused of it.

"Freddy claims he can prove you guilty. He has the wound, you know. A dozen know of your threat in the saloon that night at cards —"

"Just a moment, officer," said Halford, looking about the walls of his cell good naturedly. "Was that a threat? He accused me of being a thief, because I won his money. Freddy is a clown at cards. It is not my game, but I have spent a great many pleasant evenings at the game and I could hold deuces and win from Freddy at an all night game. He is afraid of me across a card table and knows it. That is why he called me a thief."

"You told Freddy that many a man had been killed for less insult," said the officer. "The thought seemed to come readily to your mind."

Halford Chase smiled sarcastically. "So they have. It has been an ordinary occurrence in the West. Is telling a fact a threat? W'y, I didn't even own a gun at that time." Halford waited for the officer to disclose more of his evidence.

"You proceeded to buy a gun and was carrying it at the time of the shooting. A dozen saw you go over the hill in pursuit of Freddy. You saw no one else there, Mr. Chase?"

"No one; I didn't even see Freddy. In fact I thought Freddy had fired the shot at me and I came back as soon as possible to keep from being ambushed. He had concealed himself in the chaparral. Freddy had told me that we should meet again, and I was expecting just what I thought had happened. I was looking across the lake at the time, enjoying the evening."

"So you had an encounter before that? Who

will prove that he threatened your life?" Halford's eye went down and his brow clouded. Arda could prove it but she was far away. He had deserted her and the child.

"I have no witness to that," he finally said.

"You disappeared very suddenly from Fish Lake when you heard that you were being accused," said the officer. What a fool he had been to run away. And now the girl's lips would be forever closed against him.

"Tell me, officer," said Halford, with a quick turn of his head, "did you go to Harvey's place and did you camp at the foot of the timbered mountain on the Chilco trail, by a willow the first night out?"

"Ah, so you knew of our pursuit?" The officer smiled. Things were shaping into place, it was plain now. Two years of concealment.

Halford dropped his head. Arda had told him the truth. She had done it for him. His mind went swiftly over those two years in the mountains. The officer made ready to lock him in.

"Just a moment, officer. Before we proceed with the trial there is another question I would like to settle. The question of clothes is very annoying. And I wish to send a few telegrams. Am I to be tried here in Fish Lake?"

"We shall start for Fairsville tomorrow. Your trial will be there."

"Very well. Make me presentable for the trip. I have money for the clothes and fixtures."

The officer nodded. He admitted that he liked the man whom duty had placed in his pathway. Yet the fact that he had failed to get his man two years

before had left a sore spot. He had felt sure that he would be promoted, but when he came back from Harvey's that hope was shattered.

"It looks very bad for you, Mr. Chase. I hope you may convince the court of your innocence."

"Thank you officer, thank you, I shall."

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE UNEXPECTED WITNESS

"You are able to pay an attorney fee, Mr. Chase?" The ablest and best known criminal attorney in and about Fairsville asked this, which proves that he was a brilliant and experienced lawyer. His name was Charles Winters, and true to his name he could freeze up, thaw into sunny spring or into a breezy chinook at will.

"I have already telegraphed to my banker in Multnomha," said Halford Chase with a glance of assurance.

"Very well."

"But what worries me most is: I have telegraphed to my father, Wellington Chase, the President of the Chase Manufacturing Company and also to Alice Fairmount to whom I am engaged to be married and have not heard a word. Yes, they have had time to reply. Sent them from Fish Lake a week ago. That is why I was compelled to send direct to my banker. I have a small inheritance in my own name."

"I see, Mr. Chase; you are a complete stranger here. You will be able to give a cash bond when you hear from your banker?"

"I think so," said Halford, beginning to show the lines of worry and apprehension that accusation finally brings. The confident manner was missing

from Halford's steel frame. He was, in fact, much troubled.

"Now to the case, Mr. Chase," said Charles Winters, in a tone of assurance. He seated himself, and his very manner told that it was simply a case of going to trial and walking out of the courtroom a free man. His clients never doubted acquittal, when in the presence of this affable and brilliant attorney.

Halford leaned back in his prison chair, brushed the film of yesterday from his eyes and began telling his story as briefly as possible. "I had come west to visit my mother's brother, Peter Harvey, up the Chilco way. The great distances of this country were a complete surprise to me. I learned at Fish Lake that my only hope of getting to Peter Harvey's place was to go with a neighbor of his who was in the village for grub. Her name was Arda — "

"Arda what?"

"She don't know," said Halford with slight uneasiness.

The attorney looked up thoughtfully.

"I went around the lake to see her and to make arrangements if possible to go up to Chilco. Freddy, the complaining witness, was there annoying her and was about to kiss her when I interfered. He was angered and said we should meet again and settle in his way when there were no ladies present. I provoked him by making sport of his threat. He is a gun-man and had five notches to his credit. Then I bought my outfit for the trip and Arda had taken my horse over to the camp with hers and I was going over to meet her on her return to the village. I was walking leisurely along the trail at

the edge of the lake and had stopped to watch the sunset and to watch for Arda's coming. I was a stranger in Fish Lake and cared but little to make new acquaintances, as I would be there but a short time and so I spent most of my time getting acquainted with the girl with whom I was to travel over the trail."

Here Winters gave an appreciative glance toward Halford. "Your motive really has nothing to do with it, Mr. Chase. Your preference for her requires no excuses."

Halford glanced up quickly.

"I did not see Arda on the hillside and thinking, perhaps, she had gone to the village by another trail watched the sunset for several moments. Then I heard a gun shot not far from me. The thought flashed through me that it was Freddy. I turned and, seeing no one, thought he had concealed himself in the chaparral and would get me with a second shot if I remained. I ran back to the village. We were to start for Chilco the next morning and I was writing a few letters to send home when Arda came to my room and told me that Freddy had been shot in the hand and that the officer was coming for me. I thought the whole thing a joke, but she was insistent and prevailed upon me to go. I stepped out of the window and went up the Chilco trail a half mile where she had my horse tied to a tree ready for me to ride away."

The eyes of the two men met. The face of Charles Winters was grave and thoughtful.

"That was two years ago this fall, and you just returned a week ago?" said the attorney.

"A week ago," said Halford. There was another silence.

"You were concealing yourself in the mountains all this time and then returned into the very teeth of the officers. Why did you do that?" A suspicious glance went up from the icy brow of Winters. The two acts seemed inconsistent.

"I began to think that her story was false. And I completely forgot the incident with Freddy," said Halford.

"What were you doing all this time in the mountains? I understand from the officer that you never went to Harvey's and that the girl never went to deliver the grub to Jim Langborn's." Charles Winters watched his client with critical eye. Halford knew Winters was wondering if he and the girl were in the mountains together, and was waiting for him to voluntarily offer the information. Winter's gaze was a problem, if not an accusation and a suspicion.

"No, I did not go to Harvey's," said Halford, giving that much concerning the two years and no more.

"Can we get this girl? Perhaps she knows of this shooting." This caught Halford off his guard, for he said: "She never told me of knowing anything about it."

"So you met after you escaped from Fish Lake?" Halford moved uneasily and he felt a burn in his cheeks.

"Yes, but she said nothing of Freddy."

"Why did you suspect that she had lied to you about the accusation against you?"

Halford squirmed again. Those months in the mountains came back with surging blood of memory; the child, his deserting it came like a blow. No, he would not tell of his culpable part in those two years, and Arda could do him no good. It would drag him down and she with him.

"It just slipped from my mind as a joke she had played upon me," said Halford.

Charles Winters paced the floor of the cell for a moment in a deep study. "Perhaps this girl knows more than we think. Can we get her?" he asked impatiently.

"Impossible." Halford Chase would rather the prison than to have the story get into the papers, his own home papers. It would be a sensation. His being a captive, veritably, in the mountains with her for two years, the child, his child and no marriage ties. He might claim a marriage, the kind she said, under the temple of the trees, but the Chase five generations and twenty-two years beat him back. What a sensation for the courtroom, what a scoop for the reporters, and he the son and heir to the Chase Manufacturing Company of Multnoma! No it would ruin him; he could not go to her and beg for her to save him after what had happened. He must face it just as it was.

"How do you know it is impossible? We *must* have her. I fancy we would find in her the missing link in this affair, the mystery in the dark, the solution to the problem which looks so impossible. She is the one chance, Mr. Chase." Winters was becoming impatient with his client. He sank down,

hopeless each time the name of the girl was mentioned.

Halford shook his head gloomily.

"But, Mr. Chase, she could prove the threat Freddy made the day you prevented his taking her kisses, she could prove the notches on Freddy's gun."

"The kisses she saved for me, the ones I took, and hurled back at her," went through his brain like shooting flames. "No; he could not ask it of her now."

"You are sure she knows of the notches on Freddy's gun and you say no one else knows. Did she tell you?"

"Yes, she told me."

"Then we must have her at any cost. We shall put you through that hole without a scratch on your skin," said Winters confidently. Again Winters brought sunny spring; he was airy, certain, and his face was beaming with victory.

What, have Arda bring the child into open court — his child! He could not deny that it was his. It would be putting a blade into the side of the original Wellington Chase of Revolutionary times to make him groan in his peaceful grave. Never! Halford would have told Winters, but for the acknowledgment of the wrong he had done this girl in the north.

Halford knew there was but one man in the world beside himself who knew where she was — Red Lightning — so he was very confident when he said:

"Perhaps you might find her, Mr. Winters."

"What kind of a witness would she make? Is she convincing, honest; would she inspire one with the

truth?" asked Winters in his most eager and pleasant mood.

The innocent eyes that had looked up to him, pleading for a name for the child, came back. Gods, their simplicity, their open frankness, no one could doubt her — except himself. The days when he had called her Little Sunset made his brain whirl, those days when five generations and twenty-two years were forcing back happiness and love for her.

"The best in the world, Mr. Winters, but it is impossible to get her." In fact so emphatic was Halford that Winters was convinced that Halford Chase knew where she was, and that she was safe in secret hiding from the world.

"They have a fairly strong case against you, Mr. Chase, but I fancy she is the dark cloud in this mystery. With her light, the notches, the threat after your preventing him kissing her, we would get an acquittal without a doubt."

Yes, Charles Winters was a great criminal lawyer; and his every muscle was tingling, eager for the conflict. He would draw a picture of Freddy stealing from innocent, loving lips, the dastardly, cowardly deed of it, and his anger at being foiled by his client. Perhaps Freddy's passion would have gone farther. It was an interference Freddy would hold for revenge.

"I will get her," said Winters, with his legal instincts aroused to white heat.

He went to Fish Lake that night and was gone for a week, but learned nothing. He returned troubled and gloomy. He knew there was a dark corner in his client's heart. He could tell where

the girl was to be found, but there were reasons why he would ever hold those two blank years a secret.

Two more telegrams and a letter to Wellington Chase were unanswered, and the day for the trial came.

The first speck on five generations of Chases was to be placed indelibly across the past and on the family name.

The courtroom was crowded and the restless audience was waiting anxiously for the trial of the Easterner. The face of the judge was solemn with judicial dignity; on the countenances of the jurymen was that old frayed expression of jealous prerogative which says, "I must be convinced beyond reasonable doubt." They looked at the gloomy accused furtively; already they could see guilt in every line of his troubled face. Freddy and the prosecutor were jubilant and filled with confidence. The judicial hammer sounded and there was silence. A dozen witnesses were in attendance for the prosecution, and were waiting to tell their brief stories; the defendant was alone save for the great Winters. Halford's father had failed to be present at the trial of his son. Freddy scanned the courtroom with a quick glance. Arda was not here as Winters had announced before going to Fish Lake. No wonder Freddy was confident of his revenge, for the day on the lake when Dude Eastern had robbed him of his chance. Arda was the one factor, the one uncertain and doubtful factor in the case, and she had not come. Arda was the one person whom he feared; she had beaten him once and of her love for the easterner he had no doubt.

Freddy's scar vibrated at the ready ear of the prosecutor at all times during the trial; often he spoke in subdued tones to him, giving information that would be of help.

Freddy was the first witness, and he went to the witness box with quick, eager steps. He told of his starting around the lake to see Arda, to send word to Jim Langborn about his ranch in the Chilco country. As he was walking leisurely along the trail he was startled by a sound, and turning he saw the defendant with drawn weapon. He reached for his own gun to defend himself when the bullet missed his body, hitting his hand, taking his own weapon out with the shot. Maimed and defenseless, he fell into the chaparral to make believe that he was dead, and stole away when the defendant had left. It was a straight-forward story.

"Who is this girl? What is her other name?" asked the judge, with a glance to the respective counsel.

Winters was quick to his feet, to explain, taking advantage of the moment to say, "She is a daughter of the north, a child of the desolation. Her father and mother are both dead, and she claims no other name, due to the eccentricities of her father. He was well known at Fish Lake and in his last few years of life was partly demented in the mining line. He wanted to raise money to drain a lake for gold. The girl was left alone in the faraway north. She would have been one of our witnesses could we have found her, but no one knows where this hidden lake of gold is located. She is still in the unknown north. Your honor, she is the unconnecting link in this case; with

her evidence we could prove this defendant innocent beyond question, without her we are unable to shatter this absurd and dastardly, fabricated story."

"Proceed," said the judge, with judicial authority.

Winters was watching the faces of the jury and doubt went over them; they were being called upon to take liberty from a man when his evidence was far away. Winters knew the cloud on their faces and sank down into his chair much elated.

"Freddy," said Winters on cross-examination, "you are a gun-man, are you not?"

"No, sir."

"Isn't it a fact that on the shattered handle of your gun you had five notches to your credit and that you had sworn to make Mr. Chase the sixth?" Every one seemed to be holding his breath, and the jury was listening for a tone of deception.

Confident that Arda was not present and that no one else knew the facts he said, "No, sir."

"You had shown Arda your gun many times, had you not?"

"I had."

"On many occasions you had exhibited pride in those five notches, Freddy?" Winters's only hope was to convince the jury that the absent witness was necessary to a fair trial.

"You were trying to kiss this girl at her tent when the defendant came up, a few days before this assault upon you, to interfere with your plans, I understand, Freddy?"

"No, sir."

"Why did you take her hand in yours and wrench

it, so that she made a cry of pain, her right hand so that she could not reach her gun to protect herself; and if this defendant had not come upon the scene you would have taken one of woman's prided virtues, the sanctity of her lips?"

"No, sir," defied Freddy.

"What were you going to do?"

Freddy sank back in his chair, and a slight tremor went over him, for the eyes of the judge were upon him.

"She had promised to marry me and on that occasion she had gone back on her word. I was slightly impatient because she was playing false." Freddy was now moving restlessly, changing his position very often. Not once did his eyes meet the searching glances of the jurymen.

"And when Mr. Chase happened to be present you were furious?" Winters' questions were fiery, seeming to explode from accusing, condemning lips.

"I was provoked because he heard our quarrel," admitted Freddy, after a short hesitation. He was deliberating on every word.

"And you said you would meet him when there were no ladies present and settle in your own way, the way that puts notches on your gun. That is your way, is it not, Freddy?"

"No, sir."

"You believed that the interference of Mr. Chase had something to do with her refusing you. In fact, Freddy, you were insanely jealous, that morning, were you not?"

"No, sir."

The effect of this, as Winters admitted, was to

throw suspicion that the girl, Arda, might be the one person who could prove his client innocent and that without her, he was not getting a fair trial. It might fill the minds of the jury with doubt whether they ought to convict without hearing the girl's story. It was evident from the puzzled faces of the jury that they were delving into conjectures to seek the missing link in the chain that the girl might have been able to join.

Freddy's pal, that day waiting on the hill at the eve of a journey into the mountains after Halford lay still in the chaparral, had seen as much as a man might well see. He knew of the meeting of the two men and had seen Freddy fall, and the smoke from the Easterner's gun who hurried over the ridge to the village. There was but one shot, and when they found Freddy's gun with the handle shot off there was no empty cylinder. Yes, he had recognized the Easterner. He was the defendant now sitting in court.

Thompson told of the purchase of the gun under Arda's advice. The Indian gloves made a slight stir of sensation about the courtroom. Several told of seeing Halford go over the ridge toward the lake, of hearing the single shot, of his coming back agitated; many more knew of the quarrel in the saloon when Halford said many men had been killed for less offense. Then the officer told of their failure to find Halford in his room at the hotel. Arda would have blushed with shame had she known the undercurrent that went through the courtroom when the officer told of his finding her there in his stead. In fact the officer was compelled to hesitate for a moment

until the listeners could get a more comfortable position in their places. Soon he continued. He and Freddy had gone to Harvey's, Halford's intended destination, but had failed to get trace of him there. It was a plain case of fleeing from justice, which is a condemning circumstance against any one who is accused.

Winters's cross-examinations were brief and moderate, for any questions he might ask would only impress the facts more clearly on the minds of the jury. The prosecution closed its case with confidence, for there could be no doubt as to the verdict. Winters sat silent, more silent and calm than he had ever been known to be in defense of a criminal. Some expected that he had a bomb to explode and was waiting for a calm to make it more pronounced and impressive. He had exploded many bombs, always held surprises for the last, and made them effective by overwhelming judge and jury with them. But Winters, the indomitable Winters, had no surprises to give this day. He was disheartened; he was all but ready to quit. The judge was still reserved and dignified, and he too saw the missing link in the chain of evidence the girl might supply. The jury was thoughtful, but duty bound them; they often looked with sympathy on the solemn, steady, vacant stare of the accused.

Winters advised Halford not to take the stand in his own behalf, but his client was determined to make his claim of innocence.

"It's suicide, Mr. Chase. The jury understand that you have no defense because we cannot get the girl; they believe she could acquit you. I see it in their faces. They know they have not received all

the evidence ; they will recommend you to the leniency of the court, if not acquit you. They didn't altogether believe Freddy or his pal. They are hesitating now. I have read more juries' faces than you have ever read books, and the language is plain. If you go on the stand Johnson will question you in regard to your relations with this girl. He is trembling for that sensational chance, fearing that you will not take the stand. When he gets to the critical point you will refuse to speak. I understand, Mr. Chase, well, that there is a chapter in the last two years you have torn out of your life as you would a repulsive and condemning page from a diary. You thought you were concealing that fact from me, but I knew it would be futile to press you. I know that you could find the girl, so does Johnson. When that impression gets into the hands of the jury you are doomed. It is your liberty at stake. When you refuse to answer Johnson's questions concerning the girl and open up that dark page of life, the jury will have no mercy ; they will think you have refused to bring her here for fear of consequences, for fear that she would convict you. Don't be a fool, Mr. Chase." Winters was imploring, and he could plead convincingly. He had his own reputation to shield, and it would humiliate him to have his client blunder.

" Do you think I would be sent to jail without making a claim of innocence to the world? Add fifteen years if necessary, but let me cleanse my soul of the guilt of concealment," said Halford with determination.

" That is a credible sentiment, but it will be one

you will afterwards rue. However, it is your liberty, Mr. Chase, not mine; but I dislike being made an ass of by my client," said Winters resignedly.

Halford took the stand and narrated simply the story he had told the officer at Fish Lake. He knew nothing of the affair. He had been looking at the sunset, waiting for Arda when the shot was fired! He saw no one. His words rang with honesty and appeal. One question was in the minds of all; where was Arda at this time — for she entered the village soon after Halford. Where was she *when* the shot was fired?

When Johnson, the prosecutor, jumped to his feet Winters's hope failed.

"You were going to see this girl, Arda, also," said the judge with a twinkle in his judicial eye.

"Yes."

"Two men going to see the same girl at the same time always ends unpleasantly for one," said the judge with humor, and then the judicial dignity gathered.

The alert prosecutor was pacing proudly before the witness. Winters slid down into his chair as if about to be condemned.

"You say, Mr. Chase, that it was about eight o'clock when you left the hotel to escape arrest?"

"Yes."

"You were in your room during the visit of this girl, Arda?"

The audience leaned foward with very keen eyes and alert ears.

"Yes."

"How long did she stay?"

Silent listening for the answer in the courtroom.

"Long enough to tell me that the officers were seeking me, and to explain the nature of the offense I was accused of having committed, and to make me see that it was necessary for me to go."

"And you went out through the window?"

"I did."

"How did you leave Fish Lake?"

"On horse back."

"Whose horse was it, Mr. Chase?"

"My own."

"I thought you said Arda had taken your horse across the lake with her own?"

"She had. That was where I was going to meet her on her way back."

"You were quite friendly with the girl, spent most of your time with her while in Fish Lake?"

"I did."

"Freddy stood in your way a little with his advances, did he not?"

Halford was slightly nettled. The accusation that Arda might prefer Freddy to him hurt.

"Not in the least." Winters sank down farther in his chair, with growing dismay.

"Weren't jealous?"

"No."

"Did you go across the lake to get your horse where Arda had taken him?"

"I did not."

"Then how did you get your horse?" thundered the prosecutor.

"Arda had already tied him to a tree up the Chilco trail so I would lose no time."

"Ah!" Johnson exclaimed. "She took a guardian angel interest in you, did she not?"

Halford did not answer, but the jury were beginning to grow pleased. They were being entertained. They were not so gloomy now. The story of the missing girl was fading. The infatuation between the Easterner and this strange girl, Arda, was mutual.

"Where did you see her again, Mr. Chase?"

"On the Chilco trail."

"So you were waiting for her?"

"Yes."

"You had planned the meeting before you left Fish Lake?"

Halford saw the condemning course he was being led. His hesitation was condemning him. He answered diffidently. "Yes." Winters slipped down farther in his chair with clouded brow.

"Where was this along the Chilco trail, Mr. Chase?"

Halford trembled; the color faded from his face. Soon he must refuse to answer, to close out those two condemning years. Winters had been right.

"At the foot of the timbered mountain," he said.

There was a short consultation between the prosecutor, the officer and Freddy. This was where the officer and Freddy had camped that same night.

"You saw the officer camped on the trail, did you not, Mr. Chase?"

"I did not."

"Did Arda?"

"Yes."

"That is when you decided not to take the Chilco trail to Harvey's, was it not?"

"I never decided—" What was he saying? Where was he being led? He dare not tell that story.

"Ah!" The prosecutor's face danced radiantly. "I see, Mr. Chase; again it was the guardian angel girl who decided?"

Halford did not answer. He sat like a statue chiseled out of stone, cold and pale.

"You don't want to answer that, do you, Mr. Chase? Very well, you need not." Johnson would rather he would not.

Winters sank farther down in his humility.

"When did you again part with the guardian angel, Mr. Chase?"

Halford Chase sat silent, finally saying, "I refuse to answer that."

Just the top of Winters's head could be seen over the table behind which he was trying to conceal himself. Ordinarily he would have been on his feet making a thousand objections, but he had warned his client and he must take care of himself. There were a pair of asses in court this day.

"Were you away from her at all during the time after you left Fish Lake and after you met at the foot of the timbered mountain?"

"I refuse to answer."

"Have you been alone all this time hiding from the officers?" asked the prosecutor, to impress the certainty of this man and the girl being together.

No answer.

The wily prosecutor turned to the jury with a cursory wave of his hand as if to say, "There is your absent witness, the missing link in the chain of evidence, locked up in this man's bosom. He knows where she is and refuses to bring her here to tell what she knows."

It was said by many that they had never seen the brilliant Winters in so tame a mood. Robbed of the picture he was going to paint before the very eyes of the jury, a picture of an absent witness hidden in the far north, the one who could set all things right, he was disheartened. He had been robbed of his argument by a stupid client. It was unlike the convincing Winters.

The picture he had made on his acute brain was now Johnson's to tell, and the prosecutor made the best possible use of it. The accused was in hiding with Arda, a rendezvous together in the unknown north, a quarrel perhaps had driven the Easterner away. Now he refused to bring the girl into court in his *defense*. Halford listened to Johnson as he talked to the jury, with a heavy heart, yet firm, hopeful and determined. He felt the web of circumstances tighten about him. Winters sat despondent; he had lost his legal lustre and was mourning over it. The prosecutor was radiant, smiling and confident, and he paced about the room as if exhibiting himself before the crowded courtroom.

The judge had charged the jury and on their faces was the seal of doom; the glances turned upon Halford Chase were filled with sympathy and an apology for what duty compelled.

Every one knew what the verdict would be; it was

in the atmosphere, and the very walls of the courtroom echoed condemnation. There was a silence, a terrible silence, the shaping of a heart to receive a blow, a shock.

Then there was a quick shifting of moving feet on the floor that disturbed the silence; it spoke of something about to happen, the unexpected.

"Be you a-thinkin' to send Halford to prison, jedge?" came a voice, calm, simple in its sadness and appeal.

That voice numbed every heart; for a moment no one seemed to know from whence came the sound, for it came from some distant depths almost an echo against the past, a vibration out of the heavens.

If the whole polar zone and the primitive north had been emptied into the courtroom the silence could not have been more appalling. Mouths went agap, some trembled, some quaked, some were petrified. The offence to judicial dignity was apparent, some one had dared to presume upon the province of the court. It is the province of every judge to have a jealous prerogative of judicial wrath, and it is his duty to execute swift punishment for contempt. Perhaps Halford Chase was the only one in the courtroom who did not turn to see a girl with a child in her arms standing by the railing that separates the judicial machinery from the audience, so that the onlookers will not get their fingers caught in the wheels of the law. The eyes of the judge were, perhaps, the last to turn upon her, for he had a judicial wrath to heat. His brow thickened, the judicial wrath gathered, the ermine was being imposed upon, soiled, and it was his business to repulse the attack. His eyes flashed with

condemnation, redolent with the punishment he was about to inflict. His face turned from the jury and rose to meet the face of the girl. The simplicity of the face, the appeal in it, the unoffending soul at work across a narrow space, innocent of wrong, touched the heart of the judge. He hesitated. To have upbraided her for her contempt would have been to lower the judicial dignity. The eyes from under the wolf hide fur were still upon the judge.

Then came his unexpected answer to her question: "If the facts warrant. It is for the jury to say," said the judge, showing that judges have hearts as well as judicial dignity.

"I ain't heard no facts yet, jedge," said the girl. Still the judge was patient.

"Do you know something about this case?" asked the judge, simply.

"I know all there is to know," she said.

The prosecutor's brow knit. Winters was himself again; his whole being tingled. He turned to his client. "Saved, Mr. Chase, saved."

Winters's bomb had been exploded; he never failed, but this was so new and dramatic, that every one marveled. The indomitable Winters had saved it until the last, the great moment. He had said he would bring the girl and she was here. The crowd looked at Winters, marveling at his greatness. The scene was theatrical; Winters ought to have been a dramatist.

Then court adjourned. Tomorrow they would listen to the story of the unexpected witness.

## CHAPTER XXII

### FOILED

"For God's sake, Winters, don't let her go on the witness stand to tell that story! It would ruin me. It would get into the papers and my chance of ever marrying Alice Fairmount would be nil, and my father would disinherit me."

The indomitable Winters was back again, and he started to turn away. "Who is defending this case?" flashed Winters, and he turned.

"Say, Winters, just a moment."

Winters turned back with clouded brow. "Your conscience is making a coward of you, Chase," he flared.

"Don't put her on the stand," implored Halford.

"What is this story you are afraid of?" asked Winters.

"Don't you see, man, that is *my* child? I left her up there in the north. She will tell the whole story. I had better be convicted for a few years."

"Oh, I see, Mr. Chase! You want to save what little reputation you can out of the wreck of another's life, regardless of her. You don't think what it means for a girl to get up before the public and acknowledge that her child has no father. You don't consider her in the least," said Winters contemptuously, turning away.

"There," said Winters. "You have spoiled the plan again with your damned fears. Johnson, the prosecutor, has got hold of her. There they go walking down the hall now. I wanted to talk to her first." Again the breath was knocked out of Winters. "Don't be so damned scared, Chase!" And he left his client standing in abject dismay.

It was eight o'clock the following morning when Winters called up the prosecutor over the phone at his office with his usual imperative demands.

"Say, Johnson, I am coming right over to your office. Wait for me; I want to see you before court opens. You will wait?"

Winters was at the prosecutor's office in less than ten minutes. "Say, Johnson, about the case for this morning. I have had a talk with the unexpected witness, in fact she was in my office until midnight. It was the greatest night of entertainment I have ever experienced. She is the pluckiest girl I have ever known. If my client had half her natural intelligence and aptitude and nerve he would be the president of his country. I suppose she told you the story also?" asked Winters, seating himself opposite Johnson at his desk.

"I have no doubt of the truth of what she claims, Winters," came the answer with a tone of unconcern.

"She does not deny having shot Freddy, but the marvel is that she would take the chance of shooting his gun out of his hand to save her lover, instead of killing the man outright."

"She must have been mighty sure of herself," said Johnson, with indifference. Winters never liked to ask a favor of the prosecutor when in such a mood.

"Exactly," said Winters, with an effort to warm his blood before coming to the point. "Then you admit that any further proceedings against my client would be persecution and not prosecution?" Winters's eye twinkled.

"Under the present accusation, yes. But I believe he needs the persecution, Winters. Think of a man leaving her, deserting her with the child way up there. Of course I understand her moral code is unsafeguarded by accepted social principles, but her code of honor is waterproof. She did not know it was necessary to have witnesses and a form to perform a marriage. She understood that they had taken each other as man and wife. It seems that her father had done the same. It was necessary up there. She accepts no higher law than a man's promise. I believe we have no right to question her ideas of honor or morals." It was plain to Winters that the prosecutor was condemning his client, and that he would show no mercy.

"My client has been spoiled, Johnson, like thousands of others. There are thousands who would not recognize such a tie. He has a sense of pride built upon customs long accepted, which he cannot overcome. It's in his blood," pled Winters.

Johnson, the prosecutor, looked at his acknowledged legal superior with dismay. "If you are here, Winters, to get me to dismiss this case against your client you have failed."

Winters jumped. This was the mood he liked to combat. Persistency was his great factor for success. "I am not asking this, Johnson, for my client. Think of dragging this innocent girl, she is almost a

child, into court and putting those two years in the mountains into the scandal columns of the dailies."

" You don't quite catch the drift, Winters. I say you have failed; rather should I have said you have been beaten. We are all right in our places, but this girl has more natural intelligence and powers of persuasion than either of us," said Johnson.

" And you are going on with the case to accommodate her. She asks to be dragged into this for revenge. I admit it will hurt him the most. When his friends get it in the Sunday issue, it will wring some of his prided vanity out of him."

Johnson was visibly annoyed.

" I was saying, Winters, that she has beaten you, she has beaten us both, she had got us both skinned a country block. You come to me to see what can be done. You think the whole matter is in my hands."

" It is professional. It is in your hands, Johnson," said Winters, tapping on the desk restlessly.

" That is where the girl has us both beaten. Under like circumstances I would have gone to you, Winters; I would have forgotten that there was a safer and more effective way," said Johnson complacently. " She did not have the confidence in humanity that you or I have."

" Then I have come to the wrong party. You refuse to grant my request to save this innocent girl the humility of scandal?" Winters was impatient. His seemed a most reasonable request and one that Johnson ought to grant after the admission he had made.

" Yes, I would refuse, but I am powerless. We

are both beaten, Winters. It has been taken out of my hands."

"Your hands? It can't be done, Johnson." Winters looked across the table at his opponent, mystified.

"I don't quite grasp you, Johnson."

"That shows our inferiority." Johnson was surely quibbling.

"I admit it, Johnson, I am no brag."

"Well, Winters, you haven't won your case. You have lost, though it is won. I didn't lose, though I have lost," said the prosecutor with his easy manner.

"You are devilishly tormenting, Johnson. Why don't you give the joke away? I am in earnest about this matter."

"Well, Winters, the girl has beaten us both. She has induced the complaining witness and his pal to leave town."

"What!" exclaimed Winters.

"It's true." Johnson looked up to Winters with a twinkle in his eye. "They left about four o'clock this morning and are probably far away by this time. I have no idea which way they went. She touched the vital spot instantly while you were coming over to argue with me. Freddy has acknowledged that he was lying and got out. I wanted to have your proud client held on another charge of deserting his child but she wouldn't listen to it. Said she could take care of him and herself."

"Plucky kid, Johnson."

"What pressure she brought to bear upon Freddy I have no means of knowing. I believe she led him

to think she could prove him guilty of perjury. At least he is gone and his pal with him. But I would like to take one shot to humiliate your client, Winters; but she refuses. Think of her coming four hundred miles to save him, walking half the way, carrying the child! When young Chase left the north she walked thirty miles to get an Indian, half blood, I believe, to follow; and when the Indian returned to report that Chase had been taken into custody she immediately came down to save him. Remarkable, the code of honor of some of the wilderness people."

Winters extended his hand. Johnson took it, and the two faced each other and smiled.

"We think we are pretty smart, Johnson, and I guess we must be for many people say so, but we have been beaten this time. Let us extend mutual sympathies."

They shook hands for a full minute in acknowledgment of their defeat.

"Johnson," said Winters thoughtfully, "I am going to mix a dose for my client that will give him a little jolt. He needs it. He is not wholly bad. I believe he has a good heart. He is as determined as a mule, but his damned conception of formality and pride, paternal pride and other trash, has distorted his sense of real honor. Good-day, Johnson."

"The case is already dismissed," called Johnson, after him.

Winters turned. "And say, Johnson, one thing more. Let us suppress this scandal. The girl might need a reputation some time. It isn't out yet,

the two years up in the mountains ; let us keep it out of the dailies."

" Depend on me, Winters. The story is safe in my hands. So long."

Winters went down the hall and was gone. Halford Chase was anxiously awaiting the return of his lawyer.

" Well, Chase, ready for the trial this morning ? " asked Winters, dropping heavily and confidently into his office chair and picking up a few papers as if the case was far from his mind.

" Necessity compels me to be ready. You have talked with Arda ? "

" Yes," said Winters, knotting his brow, answering the question but giving nothing more.

" She will make me a good witness ? " asked Halford, beginning to feel the repulse of the prison doors. " What does she know of importance, Winters ? Do they intend to drag me through that unfortunate two years in the mountains ? " asked Halford with concern.

" Johnson is determined. He got to see her before I did, you know, and the story will prejudice the jury against you. She understands that you took her as your wife, Mr. Chase."

" But there is no law ; it often happens —"

" Only the law of honor. You were of the opinion that five generations were necessary to make a man ; however, you are conceited in that opinion. It took five generations to unmake you. You have missed, are missing a great love, a great woman, if woman she may be called, for she is little more than a girl,

even now. It is her code of honor that brought her here; she looks upon you as her mate even yet. Think of her bringing the child over four hundred miles of mountain trail to offer assistance after what you have done." Halford Chase was feeling the sting of every word on the tender heart within him encased in the moulded fragments of shattered steel, tempered by twenty-two years.

There were many moments of silence. Winters was pleased to see the pain on his client's face.

"So she told you the whole story?" asked Halford.

"I convinced her that it was necessary for your defense. You concealed the facts from me; she told me, Mr. Chase. It is in keeping with the difference in your characters. Now let us get down to business, for we will have to be at the courtroom in half an hour."

Winters looked out of the window thoughtfully, a twinkle in his eye. He was mixing that little dose of poison. Finally he turned abruptly.

"Arda's evidence will clear you."

"But is there no way to keep this infernal story out of the court?" Halford asked.

"Perhaps we might manage that in a minute if it is worth anything to you."

"It is, Winters, a thousand dollars. It's all I have here."

Winters smiled with satisfaction.

"What does she know that will clear me?" asked Halford.

"She fired the shot that wounded Freddy in the hand." Winters spoke with little concern.

Halford jumped to his feet. "She, Winters —" He stared at his lawyer in amazement.

"Yes, Mr. Chase. Freddy was about to shoot you down. She was returning around the lake and had stopped to rest, and was waiting by the trail to surprise you when Freddy came down the hill to get you in his pleasant way and make a sixth notch out of you. She got him in the hand and blew his gun into pieces. You would now be a mummy, as you would have been Caribou Meadow dust if it had not been for Arda, whom you deserted with your child."

Halford started to speak, but Winters threw up a silencing hand.

"Don't say it isn't yours! We know better, Mr. Chase. It's all yours except the honor, the pride that refuses to give it your name."

Halford Chase was crestfallen; he could again feel the crumbling of the steel, this time not by convulsions or revolutions but by the gradual erosions of time. At first he was inclined to be angry, but it would not be well to quarrel with the lawyer who had his liberty in his hands, so he refrained from a demonstration and accepted the accusing tone as a child might a paternal reprimand.

"So my acquittal is certain? How about the story, that wild oats story, that insane folly of mine?"

"That is a wonderful pride, Mr. Chase, a wonderful one. Were it turned into a more legitimate accomplishment you might be a noble piece of humanity. I am beginning to admire your persistency. But your view-point is culpable. There is a whole-sized man in you yet if you would let it speak for

you once. You wanted this girl, you loved her, Mr. Chase, but you give her up, and now you don't think of her. Just the disgrace of the story so far as it affects you."

Halford thought a moment, but Winters saw an inner trembling, a consciousness of a weakness, a yielding to that emotion which the five generations had suppressed.

"Let us not discuss it, Winters," said Halford.  
"You said you might suppress the story."

"It is worth a thousand dollars to you—" Winters ruminated.

"It is."

"Very well, Mr. Chase. If I do not keep the story out of the courtroom I do not get the money. If I do, you pay the thousand to the party whom I name."

"You are not getting me into bribery?" asked Halford suspiciously.

"No, indeed. It's straight, Mr. Chase."

"Your offer is fair, Winters. The bail money is here."

Winters turned to his desk for a moment. "Here is the order for the thousand bail money now in the hands of the court, Mr. Chase." Winters read all but the name of the party to whom the money was to be paid:

"Please pay to Arda the sum of \$1,000, the amount of my bail," he read.

"Sign it, Mr. Chase."

Halford did so. "But how are you so sure of this, Winters?"

Winters waved his hand carelessly.

"Give the order to Arda, Mr. Chase. Go over to the Windsor Hotel and give it to her. She has already suppressed the story for you. She had the case against you dismissed early this morning. I had nothing to do with it."

"You don't mean it, Winters!" exclaimed Halford Chase, rising to his feet, bewildered, his eyes showing a wide rim of white.

"She was saving you for that girl back in Multnomah, Mr. Chase. She told Freddy and his pal to leave town and they went. Give her the order. It's only fair. Good morning, Mr. Chase."

## CHAPTER XXIII

### A QUESTION OF TENDER

The child in her arms, Arda stepped to the desk to pay her hotel bill at Fairsville. She was going back over the long trail to the dim horizon.

"Six dollars," said the clerk, a young man of perhaps twenty-one years whose experience was limited by the line drawn about Fairsville, a small city of eight thousand people.

Arda drew a buckskin sack from her coat pocket and poured out perhaps an ounce of gold dust, and held it out to the exasperated, suspicious hotel clerk.

"We deal in money here," he said. "Give me six dollars."

Arda looked at the man in surprise and disconcerted wonder. "It's gold, twenty dollars worth of it."

"We don't deal in yellow sand. Give me six dollars or I will call in the police."

"But I haven't got the money. This is good. They always took it at Fort George," said Arda, a flush of embarrassment mounting to her cheeks.

"Oh, yes, you have. Come through with it. We don't want any trouble over this, but you are going away and we want our money." The clerk now spoke with threatening impudence.

Their eyes stared into each other's; the clerk's were defiant, Arda's imploring.

"Aren't you going to pay me?"

"This is all I have and it is worth eighteen dollars an ounce; there is more than an ounce of it." She poured out perhaps another ounce, about forty dollars in all.

The clerk stepped to the telephone and called up the police.

"Just a moment and we'll see if you pay us." Arda was trembling with fright. She sat down and waited. What was she to do? What would they do to her? Surely the officer would know gold when he saw it. A mist dimmed her eyes. The clerk watched her with insolent gaze.

"Don't you know gold unless some one else puts a stamp on it for you?" asked Arda with a tremor in her voice. This nettled the clerk.

"So can I tell copper. It's an old game. We never got caught, but Henry at the other place went broke a few years ago staking a man on copper filings. The officer will be here in a minute." The clerk watched her critically. When the officer came hurrying in, the clerk jumped to his feet. "This girl owes us six dollars for a room and meals and refuses to pay."

"I didn't," said Arda indignantly.

The officer looked the girl over, the wolf-hide fur, mackinaw coat, the heavy woolen skirt meeting the tops of the heavy laced shoes.

"Why don't you pay him?" asked the officer.

Arda's eyes pled with the officer in spite of the gathering mist.

"I—I offered him twenty dollars in gold dust. They always took it at Fort George. They always

took it and weighed it for us. It's gold." She held the buckskin sack out to the officer.

"She is stalling, officer. She told us she had the money when she came in a couple of nights ago. She can pay if she wants to," said the irate clerk.

The officer looked from one to the other of the two and said, "Have you got the money?" He was intently watching the accumulating tears. He opened the sack and looked into it.

"Just the gold. I offered him twenty dollars worth of it. It's good." She trembled, watching the face of the officer.

Still the man hesitated. The clerk paced back and forth before him. The man of the law was less inclined to distrust the eyes that looked so imploringly and innocently into his. They had softened a judicial wrath, why not a policeman's vanity?

"Perhaps we can get you some money for it if it is the real stuff," said the officer. "Come with me."

"What is the trouble?" came a voice at Arda's side as she turned to dry her eyes. She did not look up to meet the inquiring eyes of Halford Chase searching one and then the other of the three.

"She has no money to pay her bill," said the officer.

"I offered them gold, Halford," she said to justify herself.

"Here, officer, let her go. I will pay it. How much is it?" He stepped to the clerk.

"I got the gold, Halford; I can get money for it. I will pay them," she said.

Halford ignored her entreaty, put the money down

on the clerk's desk and turned to her. "I came over to see you, Arda."

He hesitated a moment for her consent to see him, but none came. He walked to a chair and requested her to sit down. She did so without giving him a glance.

"What brought you down here, Arda,— tell me, won't you?" he asked. Winters's accusation was clear in Halford's mind. He glanced momentarily to the child in her arms with a tremor of guilt.

She looked up. "It's no use for us to talk about it, Halford — now," she said.

"I wish to know, Arda. How did you know they had me arrested?" he persisted. "Let us go into the waiting-room over there where we can talk in quiet."

"I sent Red Lightning to follow you to Fish Lake," she said, after they were seated. "I knew you didn't believe me, when you went away; you thought I done it all, everything I done to win you, Halford. I knew you thought that the morning you left singing that song. You said I only had the right to answer when you called. You never called me, Halford. I thought you did, or we wouldn't never have had Little Hal." She was looking away with unseeing eyes.

Halford trembled. He felt now that he had wronged her and that he must make, at least offer, restitution.

"You named him that. So it's a boy, Arda." Something told him that he ought to give him the Chase name, but still he recoiled.

"Yes, Halford. When Red Lightning came back and told me about them getting you I knew I must come. I just couldn't help coming. I was to blame and I wanted you to go back to her, Halford."

It was plain to Halford Chase. He could not keep down the emotion that had disturbed him for the past two years.

"You love me still, after all I have done! That is why you came, Little Sunset," Halford was saying to himself as his gaze went out the door across the street thoughtfully. He was hesitating now in a battle with the five generations, his pride. His heart told him clearly that he loved her, but the armour was struggling to force it back.

"I am not going back to her, Arda. No, I am not," he said.

"Where are you going, Halford?" She was toy ing with the buckskin sack of gold, master of every emotion within her.

"I am going back with you, up north. I want to go back with you. I have wanted you all along, but I thought you had deceived me; but you didn't. It happened the way it did because you loved me, Arda, and now I want you."

There were many moments of silence.

"Can't I go back with you, Little Sunset?" he asked.

Arda was now thoughtful. Every emotion rose within her, and had he taken Little Hal in his arms at that moment and said, "Come," she must have followed where he led. Was he saying that out of a regard for duty and self-sacrifice for what he had done?

"No, Halford. You must go back home — it's in your blood. You just feel the way you do, because of what's happened. You must go back to her."

"I don't love her, Little Sunset; I want you."

"No, Halford, you got to go home. I don't need you now; Little Hal don't need you, cause he's got no name and you wouldn't give him yours. You never called, Halford. I made a mistake and it wasn't for you to answer a girl. You just got to go back."

He trembled. His mind went swiftly over the past. He had liked her from the first, but the steel in him had forced it back. She had broken the steel, shattered it, but he had gathered it up again. He was beginning to feel that it would wear away by the erosions of time and then he would want, oh, how he would want this girl. He felt the passion within him, the conflict.

"But I will give him my name now, Little Sunset," he pleaded. "I want to go back and be happy with you, make you know what life is, give reparation for what I have done."

"No, Halford. I thought you wanted me once. You said you did, but you've got a mate back there. She is waiting for you. She's your kind, she's your station. You got to go. Little Hal can get along without a name, same's I have. I will never desert him. The bear, the wolves don't desert their young until they get big enough to look after themselves. I can look after Little Hal, cause he's mine. He ain't yours. You said so. He don't want you because you wouldn't give him a name."

It was hard for her to say these things against the

one she loved ; but he did not offer to take the child, and Little Hal had rights now which she must recognize. He saw how determined she was, yet her voice was breaking with emotions. Still the eroding steel in his heart did not tell him that he might win her, that her heart was pleading, crying for him to win her. If he would only call to her as the mate calls and give her a chance to answer. She believed that still he was only answering the call to him which she had made in the interminable north and she had fallen into disgrace.

She refused to take the thousand dollars he offered. Dropping the buckskin sack into his pocket in return for paying her bill she turned away and left him trembling in the hotel office.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### THE FIFTH GENERATION

There was a sting in Halford's heart, a feeling of great loss as he stepped into the coach of the east-bound express. He was beginning to know his dependence upon the stalwart, paternal stem which had sustained him so long. Yet they had left his telegrams unanswered with a silent contempt as a return for the past two years. He never felt so utterly alone in the world as he felt now, with his father and Alice ignoring him, and Arda forced him gently aside. His mind was not at ease, there was revolt in his heart for Multnomia's neglect, yet he hurried home to explain and to claim his heirdom, and to plead again with the waiting girl.

From Winnipeg he sent two telegrams telling of his swift return, at St. Paul he sent two more and at Chicago still another two. He was making reparation for the two neglectful years. He wanted them to feel that he was coming. Yes, he would make their hearts throb with expectation, fill them with humility for their failure to come to his aid in time of need. He built strongly upon the future as he neared the city of his birth.

At last he hurried through the familiar depot at Multnomia. He was home, but there was no one to meet him. They were going to force him on his knees

before them, yet he could expect no more after their failure to answer his letters and telegrams.

He thought of Arda. She had come to his rescue when the rest of the world had failed. The streets of Multnomah crowded him as if to force him out; he felt them press against his soul. Taking a cab at the depot he was driven direct to the Chase home. Paying the cabman he hurried up the stone walk and entered the hall, smiling with expectation as he walked in to meet Alfred. Halford liked scenes and his home coming would set one to his liking, at least among the servants.

He had just entered when a man came rushing upon him. "What are you doing in here? What do you want?"

Still Halford smiled into the face of the irate servant. It hurt not to find Alfred at his post at a moment like this.

"W'y, I am Wellington Chase's son — Alfred has left?" Halford started to take off his coat. "I have been away for two years. Just returned. Can't you telephone Mr. Chase at the mills and tell him that I am here?" Halford misinterpreted that stare of the servant and smiled at his abject bewilderment.

Finally words came to the rescue of the man. "Wellington Chase doesn't live here. You have come to the wrong place, young man." Halford met the inquiring, almost condemning eyes with another hearty laugh.

Soon realization came to the prodigal. Halford looked about him. There was mystery in the familiar walls, things were slightly different and Al-

fred's absence made him shiver. His brain was whirling. "This is the place. Wellington Chase, the owner of the Chase Manufacturing Company, lives here. I am his son. I have been west for two years. I lived in this house twenty years. Guess I know the place. What joke are you playing on me for being away so long?"

"Sorry, young man, but Mr. Bailey owns this residence. Bought it a year ago."

A flush came to Halford's face as a woman appeared with lifted brows. "What seems to be the trouble?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon, madam," said Halford with a bow. "I used to live here, in fact I have lived here all my life. The thought did not occur to me that Wellington Chase might have sold. I have been west for two years and just returned. I thought I was home and entered. The servant was trying to explain to me that I had made a mistake."

"It was very careless at the least," said the woman with arched brows, and she turned away.

Halford spoke again. "I wonder if either of you could tell me where Wellington Chase lives in the city." He had now partly recovered himself, but the haughty manner of the woman repulsed him.

"We know nothing of Mr. Wellington Chase. Won't you kindly go, Mr. Chase?"

Halford turned quickly. He fancied he knew why the pater had sold, but how unlike Wellington Chase to give way to a sentiment. He had misunderstood his father. The death of one and the desertion of the other had driven him from the home he had made for mother and son. Halford hailed another cab

and directed the driver to take him to the Fairmount residence. Alice would be waiting for him, but after the repulse of his own home he felt a slight misgiving. She had not answered his letter or the telegrams. But he had her promise to wait for him — not so long, but she would surely wait. Soon he announced himself at the door.

Halford waited anxiously for her coming.

"Miss Fairmount cannot see you, Mr. Chase."

"What! Alice says she cannot see me!" Halford Chase stared at the servant, trembling, palsied. "There is some mistake. Did you tell her; you made no mistake in the name?"

"There was no mistake, Mr. Chase."

Halford was insistent. "Kindly take a note to her for me. I will wait for an answer. She does not understand. I can explain everything."

Soon the servant came back.

"There is no answer. She begs you to go at once."

Halford turned toward the door, every inch of him trembling. A haze went over his eyes; he steadied himself for a moment at the casing. Everything was whirling. What was the strange meaning of things? Multnomah was repulsing him. He went slowly down the walk, as if in a dream. He directed the waiting cabman to take him to the Keller block. Gods, would no one see him? His mind shot into the north where there were no repulses. Yes, he felt now that he had wronged Arda.

He was soon at Dr. Brewster's office. Here he would be welcomed, he knew, for the college days had left a tie. Halford stepped into his private office

and the doctor turned from his desk. Halford's lips were trembling; his face was vibrating with fear during that one moment of hesitation.

Then, as recognition came, Dr. Brewster jumped to his feet with genuine welcome.

"Hallo, old man," said the doctor. They shook hands and held each other's clasp for many minutes, searching each other's faces for memories. A cloud went over the doctor's face almost as soon as it had brightened, his lips were trembling also. He wanted to speak but was silent. The manner of welcome went as swiftly as it came and now it was a strange mood of sympathy. Halford could endure no more.

"For God's sake, Doctor, why don't you say something — speak! What does it all mean, you are so damned queer?" said Halford, dropping the hand and falling into a chair.

"You just got in, Halford, old man? Been up to the old home yet? But sure you have."

"Yes. What is the trouble, Doctor? I walked in to find strangers in my father's house. They told me he had sold a year ago. I never knew he had a sentiment. Mother's going, my leaving him as I did broke him up. These two years make a long story, Doctor. You don't wish to hear it now —"

"Not now. You haven't seen your father?"

"No. I am intending to go to the mills to see him. They didn't know where he lived."

Dr. Brewster turned away that he may not meet the gaze of his friend as he said, "Better not go to the mills, Halford."

"Why not?" Halford got to his feet again. "You are so strange, doctor. What is wrong?"

"The mills have closed down," said Dr. Brewster, taking up a bottle, to paste a label upon it. Halford could not speak.

"Halford, you will find your father at 1368 Walnut Street."

"What is that you are saying, doctor; way out there?" Again Halford sank down into a chair. The mills were closed down, Alice would not see him, the old home sold and his father living at 1368 Walnut Street, far from the residence center.

"He has a four-room cottage out there, Halford. You will very likely find him there at this hour," advised Dr. Brewster in a faraway tone.

"What has happened, old man? I can't grasp things. You don't mean that my father is living in a cottage, that he is broke, that I have ruined him, my going?" Dr. Brewster dropped the bottle on the floor. It was terrible the way his friend was suffering. He dare not tell him now. He must realize what had happened a little at a time.

"You better go out to see your father first, Halford. Come back tomorrow at five. We shall go to dinner together, then we shall come back here and have a long talk. You are completely upset. So am I. Your coming, the way things have changed. It is your father's right to tell you the story, Halford." Dr. Brewster was looking down into the crowded street, realizing the mercilessness of human changes.

Every muscle was palsied; his words came in broken, convulsive throbs. "Doctor, this is hell. Even Alice refused to see me. I can't grasp things all at once. I want to hear about it all, yet I am

afraid, even to go to father." He brushed his hand across his brow to clear his vision.

"Alice is to be married next month, I believe," said Dr. Brewster simply.

"Next month?" He clung to his chair to steady himself.

"Yes; it was part of the game, Halford."

"She promised to wait for me. But I don't blame her for it. I will tell you some time." Twice Halford tried to get up but fell back. He staggered to the door. Dr. Brewster quickly caught him by the shoulder.

"Halford, old man, it's just the same between us, just the same as before. Perhaps I was a little indifferent at first but I couldn't tell you; I didn't want to make you suffer and I knew it must come. Come back tomorrow after you have seen your father. I want to see you and talk to you, and help you start out in life anew."

"So long, doc. Thank you. It's hurting you too, I can see that. I don't blame you; I came in so unexpectedly and caught you unguarded." Halford went down the elevator and taking another cab hurried beyond the business center of the throbbing city, beyond the fashionable residence district and still on and on, passing many vacant lots and blocks until the scattered dwellings were mere cottages. At one of these the driver drew up. It was the one Dr. Brewster had mentioned.

Halford rapped this time on his father's door, but receiving no answer rapped again, then entered uninvited. Halford stepped into a room darkened by drawn curtains and before him across the room in a

big arm chair sat Wellington Chase, the ghost of the glittering past, staring at him.

"W'y, hallo, father."

Halford stepped quickly forward with an extended hand, but the man in the chair made no reply, no welcome was in his face and he did not rise.

What a cold repulse for those two silent years!

"Father!" came with a slight desperation. Still there was no movement, no twinkle came to the staring, glassy, penetrating eyes, no cutting of the set cheeks, no vibrations of the face expressive of contempt, hatred or of greeting, and the hands on the arms of the chair made not the slightest movement, the stare was interminable. Halford watched only for a moment, when understanding came.

Halford hurried to the nearest telephone and called up Dr. Brewster.

"Come out at once, doctor," said Halford. "I will wait here at the store for you."

The tone of Halford's voice was disturbing, and it meant haste. In less than an hour the two men were again at the cottage. Dr. Brewster looked at the form, still quiet and peaceful. He took up one of the chilly hands, touched the eyelids and drew back.

"Is he dead, doctor?"

"Quite dead, Halford, old man. It's all over. It was more than he could bear. He couldn't wait for you, you came too late, and how he wanted you, yes, how he wanted you! He came to me each day and asked me what he should do to find you."

The two men turned away.

"He said nothing to you about my telegrams or my letters?"

"Nothing, Halford. I don't believe any one knew where he was. He came here as if into exile, but it's over now," said Dr. Brewster.

They walked to the door.

"You better come with me, Halford."

"Yes, doctor."

## CHAPTER XXV

### “WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS, HALFORD?”

The fifth generation was laid at rest beside Halford's mother.

The life that had been made to order for Halford Chase was quickly taken from him, and no longer was he afraid of a tightening of the noose about his neck. It was a blow that stunned. He had been cast in pairs, but the tie was severed and the top rung of the ladder had broken under him. Alice had held to the higher rung and had drawn herself up; but Halford, always looking down to see what he had missed, had fallen into the dust. His mind went into the desolation, to the lone cabin on the shore of a lake beyond the dim horizon. Little Sunset was there and his blood and hers had mixed in a human life. She had never failed him in return for what he had done. For a moment he recoiled from the thought, then a great emotion came. Yes, they had loved each other. What would the future now be: Little Sunset or the law — or both?

“Sit down, Halford, old man,” said Dr. Brewster, “there is plenty of room here, an empty bedroom there, which you can just as well occupy until you have gathered yourself together. In fact, I would like to have you here with me to renew those old days at Yale, at times.”

"Very well, Doc."

Halford's whistle had gone, for there was no metal ring to echo it back, and the very sound of it repulsed him.

"Doctor, tell me about it: these past two years. The light was so glittering, dazzling when I left and now — now — there is no light."

"It's dark now, Halford, terribly dark for you, I suspect, but the light will come again, and when it does it will not be a reflection against a mirror that gets into your eyes to blind you, dazzlingly, but a real, glorious day, the kind you hoped for when we were in the same rooms down at Yale, planning. Don't you remember how we planned, and built upon the future, you for the law, I for medicine? When you came back they put a mirror in front of you and held it there always until you came to be proud of the picture."

"Yes, I have been desperately clutching for support ever since I returned. Tell me about it."

"Well, Halford, I had hoped when you came into my office that day that your father might tell you, but it has fallen to me."

"Yes, to you, doctor. You have the next right. Go on."

He leaned back into his chair. "Wellington Chase came to me after you went away, Halford, and told me what you had decided to do. He was jubilant, for you had accepted his plans and he was like a child in his happiness. You never knew he had a sentiment. He told me of your engagement to Alice Fairmount."

"Yes, Doctor, that was a part of the plan to

unite the two companies, the Chase Manufacturing Company and the Diamond Mill Company. We never loved each other, doctor, I never kissed her in my life but it was a part of the glitter, the reflected light that dazzled me. It was a trial to give up those dreams of the law we had planned at Yale."

"I suppose you knew of your father's intended plan to triple the company's stock for his growing business?" asked Brewster.

"He told me of it, and was anxious to hasten the marriage with Alice to protect the placing of that stock. Yes, we had the day set, but it never occurred to me that there was danger ahead."

"Well, one fact never came to light until a short time ago. The attorney for the Chase Manufacturing Company had the matter well in his hands and your father trusted him implicitly. He was then in love with the girl who had promised to be your wife. He had planned your ruin from the first, we all suspect now."

"But how could he ruin father?" Halford looked up quickly.

"This way, Halford. Your father trusted him entirely. He had been the attorney for the Chase people for several years, and no one knew that he was mad about Alice Fairmount. Your failure to return for the wedding after it had been announced angered Mr. Fairmount almost into insanity."

"But I intended to return. I will tell you about it, doctor, when you have finished." Halford went over those two years in the mountains with swift recollection. He caught his mind returning into the dim horizon very often.

"But the Fairmounts took your failure as an open and intended insult to their pride. Macnamer saw his chance. The traitor in him came to light, he sold the stock so that it could get into the hands of the Diamond Mill Company people at any moment and your father never suspected until he was deposed from the presidency of the company and the mill was closed down indefinitely. He had mortgaged his home to take up some of the stock himself. He was induced to do this by Macnamer. It was a bold, ruthless plan from the start, but it succeeded. Your father refused to believe that Macnamer was at the bottom of it until his engagement with Alice was announced a short time ago. They took your father's home out from under his aging steps and he saw ruin ahead, and got out with barely enough to keep him out of the poorhouse for a few years. I saw he would not last long. He failed from the first. His heart was broken, and each day he came to me to talk about you."

"I was to blame, doctor. I should not have gone west," Halford said with a mental shot across the dim horizon.

"He never accused you, Halford. But he was always wondering in a dream why you did not come back. 'I was too severe with Halford,' were the last words he said to me the day before you came, old man. No, he did not blame you. He saw his mistake of hewing a line for you to follow."

"But it wasn't that, doctor. I intended to come back, I never intended to fail him that way, by deception."

There was a silent moment.

"It is always one's friends that turn traitor to fail one."

"Yes, Macnamer was nothing less. The old, old love scene. But we must have friends, Halford. They are our greatest asset in business and in happiness."

"Yes, doctor, in happiness." Again Halford's memory shot into the north. Yes, she had been true, and they were happy days until it came to the shattering of the steel about his heart.

They listened to the rumble of carriage wheels on the pavement without, then Halford looked up.

"I suppose you wonder why I did not come back?"

"Yes, we all wondered and waited. Your father must have thought you had played him false at times. He said you never wrote to him."

"No." Halford settled back in his chair. A film gathered over his eyes to close out surrounding things and he started on the story that pleased and hurt at the same time. He told of the girl he had met on the depot platform. "Those were the happiest days of my life, Doctor, those spent at Fish Lake prior to our journey into the hills. It was so new and I was completely myself, care-free; for my future was settled. I never dreamed that she loved me and I was so lost in my own delight and happiness that I did not realize that I returned everything she gave; but I dare not acknowledge it, doctor, to the world. I had decided upon my future, but for a time I completely forgot the past, everything, to make that my happy day, the last, I knew, I should ever have. I must have led her to believe in me, trust me. My taking her kisses must

have told her much, for she had a strange honor about giving kisses."

Halford hesitated a moment. "Everything I said and did came so natural, that she could not have doubted me. Yes, I really loved her then and she divined in me what I had not discovered myself. She saw the one side and I saw the other."

"Hers was the true side, and you will return to it some day, Halford."

He did not answer.

Halford told of Freddy's threat, the shot, Arda's warning him, the pursuit of the officer, their going into the north, the duel in that insane moment, her recovery, the days at Caribou Meadows and his rescue and recovery. But one fact he carefully concealed; the child, Little Hal, and his refusing to give him his own name. In telling the story it was to Halford's credit that he always justified the girl for what she had done.

"Don't blame her, doctor. I was to blame and I couldn't help it." He told of the arrest and the trial, and of her sending Red Lightning to watch him, her coming to the trial, her dramatic appearance at the last moment. When Halford had finished Dr. Brewster sat in thought. It was the strangest story of all his experience, and he was going over it trying to realize that it was real. Many moments went by, then Dr. Brewster looked up.

"You will hate the man who gets her next love, Halford, who gets the kind of life she will give, that which you have turned away," said Brewster.

"No one will ever get it, doctor. That is the trouble. If I knew that she would forget I would

never think of her again. That does not trouble me, it's that I will miss so much, so much that I have really taken from her life."

"You never intend to go back to her?" There was almost a reprimand in Dr. Brewster's voice.

"Do you think I ought, doctor? Our lives are separated by a continent of social distinctions." The last convulsive flutter of five generations went out on those words. The five generations had gone. Perhaps Halford would find it easier to combat the twenty-two years.

"Perhaps not, Halford. But I have always thought that love finds its level — you loved her."

Halford rose and paced the floor for many moments, restlessly. "Love finds its level," he repeated over and over. Those words seemed to fit peacefully in his heart and brain.

"Thank you, doctor, for saying that. Pride always taught me different. I believe you are right. I could never have acknowledged it even to myself. I did really care for her."

Again he paced the floor.

"But she sent me away at the last moment. Yes, she was right. It's in my blood, I will stay here."

"What are your plans, Halford?"

Halford went to his chair and sat down again. "They were arranged at Yale, several years ago. They have only been postponed a few years."

"You mean that you intend to take up the law?"

"Yes. It has always been my ambition. I have a few thousand left out of my mother's inheritance. It brings me in about a thousand a year. I will go back and be degreed again."

## CHAPTER XXVI

### HALFORD FINDS HIMSELF

The moment Halford Chase decided to abandon the girl forever the memory of Little Sunset commenced haunting him. He invoked all his determination to his rescue and three years went into merciless time.

"You have been working too hard, Halford," said Dr. Brewster.

It was the same words that came apprehensively each time Halford came home. Now he had been dereed into the law and he had steeled every fiber of his being to carrying out the promises for the future, but still memory kept up that incessant prayer for admittance to the rebellious heart.

"If you should vanish like a ghost some of these mornings it would not surprise me in the least. You are but a shadow of the man who came into my office after those two years in the sun and the mountains. You ought to go to the country and get a little more ozone into your system before setting up your office, Halford."

"No, doctor, I intend to start practicing at once. It isn't likely that I will be rushed with business for a year or so. I will have plenty of time to rest," said Halford, with that strange glare in his eyes that had worried his friend for more than two years.

"But *will* you rest, that is the question? If

business does not come at once you will be worrying over your present failure. You might better keep busy. What is on your mind, old man? You are not thinking still over the turn things have taken?" asked his friend with concern. In fact, he feared a physical and mental collapse.

"Not a bit, old man," said Halford, releasing his friend's hand. Dr. Brewster believed he saw a trace of secretiveness and deception in the quick, evasive glance of his friend.

"Well, Halford, the room you occupied three years ago is still vacant. It is yours if you will take it."

"Have you decided to make the world's record in your profession without a helpmate, and be a crabbed old bachelor all your weary days?" asked Halford with a smile.

"Can't find her, Halford. You lucky dog, you found yours and turned her away. If she is the kind of woman you have pictured her, Halford, I would want her myself, in the dust or out of it. We all go back to it sooner or later. Remember, old man, you are at the bottom of the ladder, yourself. She might help you." Halford smiled gruesomely. He had often thought of that, but there was little use trying to open a sealed book.

"Do you accept my offer of the room or do you go by yourself?" asked Dr. Brewster.

"I accept."

The next day Halford rented two rooms in the Willard block and moved up a small library, then sat down behind a flat top desk where he could watch the door. Clients were few. No one seemed to

notice the gilt letters spelling his name. One client came the first month and deposited two dollars with him. The second month his cash book was a clean outlay. The fourth month two clients came, recommended by the one who first came. One of them had saved ten dollars out of a saloon brawl and left it with Halford. The sentence was suspended on condition that the man should attend church ten consecutive Sundays. He did. The other client had saved only five dollars out of the same brawl and was sent ten days to jail and was much the better pleased of the two men.

Halford was riding in street-cars now. Spring came and more often a client and more often Dr. Brewster's warning for his health. Indeed, Halford was growing nervous and the most trivial things disturbed him for hours.

Then Multnomah went into a spasm, a veritable fit of indignation. Its main street had been desecrated with a blotch of innocent blood, so they said. A girl with a child in her arms had done it and the man, James Roberts, fell at Alice Macnamer's side. Roberts was one of Macnamer's closest friends and Alice's name was in the scandal column of the daily that told of the tragedy.

Society was stamping its slipped foot, paralyzing its offended tongue. The deceased was manager of the largest wholesale house in the city and Macnamer was its attorney.

Halford Chase was troubled that night while he talked with Dr. Brewster of the crime. He was guilty of the same provocation in the far north but Arda had permitted him to live. He went to bed

early that night and was at his office the next morning before eight.

For the first time in four months, Halford's telephone rang as he stepped into the office.

"Yes, this is Chase — at the office, I just came in — will I come up to the jail? — W'y, yes, to save the trouble of your coming down to get me. Got an empty cell, have you? — Yes, I have been looking for cheaper quarters for some time, but how did you know of my plight? I thought I was very clever in concealing it from every one." Halford laughed and hung up the receiver. Taking his hat he stepped out and locked the door, hurrying to the city bastile.

The jailer was waiting. "A girl wishes to see you, Mr. Chase. I suppose you saw the account of the tragedy in the paper last night. She wishes to see you."

Something caught in Halford's throat, and the color faded from his cheeks. The girl who had executed punishment for the same offense he had committed wished him to defend her.

"Sorry, Mr. Chase, but you will have to see her in her cell. We were afraid she might attempt to take her own life."

Halford was led back through the gloomy passageway. It reminded him of the catacombs, it was even more heart-stirring, for these were living victims who could yet suffer.

The keeper locked him in the cell. "Just call when you wish to go, Mr. Chase," said the keeper, walking away.

Halford now turned to the victim. In the dark corner of the cell the girl was huddled on a cot, on

which lay a couple of blankets. Finally she turned to him a pitiful, pleading face. As he had expected, it was a pretty face, cut gruesomely with newly made lines of sorrow and desperation. As quickly as night clouds the day had the change come to hide a life.

"You are Mr. Chase?" She asked with a voice that went straight to Halford's heart.

"Yes."

"Dr. Brewster attended me not long ago and spoke very highly of you as an attorney, so I have sent for you to see what may be done for my defense, if I have any. Not that it matters much now."

She was a pitiful picture in her distress and abandonment. Her hair was down, and she brushed the dark locks from her face.

"I haven't any money now, Mr. Chase — "

"Perhaps we can arrange for the present without it, Miss White," he said. "Tell me your story. Leave out nothing, for I must know all the facts if I am to defend you."

"You will defend me, then, Mr. Chase?" Her words were a plea for sympathy, justification for what she had done. He was trembling. In justice to her, could he make a plea for her when every word he could say in her behalf would be an accusation against himself?

"Let me hear your story," he said, that he might gather himself together.

"Yes, Mr. Chase. I will make it as brief as I can. It is a very long story, for it began two years ago. "She stopped abruptly, watching his face for sympathy.

"Two years; yes, Miss White, go on."

"I have no father or mother—" Something in his manner caused her to hesitate again. Halford started, his mind went back swiftly to a girl on the dim horizon. Arda had no father or mother.

"Go on," said Halford, with an effort to control himself.

"I worked my way through a business college here in Multnomah three years ago, and secured a position with Mr. Roberts." Yes, it was the story he had read in the papers. The pale face with dishevelled hair in the dim-lighted cell made a ghastly, pitiful picture, condemning him.

"Mr. Roberts seemed to take an interest in me and advanced me rapidly, and two years ago I was taken into his office as his private secretary. I thought his interest in me was due to my struggle. I worked hard, Mr. Chase." Again she hesitated. "Mr. Chase, I was decent. He was kind to me and I came to like him. Soon he asked me to go places with him, to the theater and the parks on Sundays." Tears were coming to the girl's eyes and her voice came in convulsive sobs, for those had been happy days. "I thought he loved me, Mr. Chase." And she ended in a fit of weeping.

Gods, those were Arda's words to him in the distant north. He was trembling more than the girl before him, but when she had again dried her eyes he had partly recovered from his own agitation.

"Go on, Miss White."

"He told me he did, Mr. Chase. I warned him that I was only a stenographer, but he said it made no difference, and one morning he took me in his

arms and kissed me. I believed him then and promised to marry him."

Halford turned away that the girl might not see his own ghastly face. She was taking scenes from his own guilty life and hurling them at him.

"He sent me money when it became impossible for me to continue at the office, as I had only just finished paying the few debts I had made to finish my course. Then he deserted me altogether. I tried to see him, but could not. I was desperate, Mr. Chase, and penniless. I was worrying, the landlady turned me out and I was forced to take a shabby room down on Market Street. You wouldn't understand all that I have endured and suffered for the past few months. I must have been mad, but when I met him on the street he would not speak to me. I shot him, Mr. Chase. God knows why I did it." The girl was crying fitfully.

Pained with a thousand memories, Halford Chase rose to his feet. "For God's sake, Miss White, don't tell me any more to-day." Her gaze broke through her own tears and she watched the man before her.

"You will take my case, Mr. Chase, and do what you can?" she asked, for he was turning as if to go.

"Yes, Miss White, but I must go now. I will come back to-morrow." He called to the jailer. His brain was whirling, he felt a sickness coming over him, he supported himself against the door of the cell.

The girl got up from the narrow bed. "Mr. Chase, you believe I may be acquitted, when they

understand. I do not know why I did it, I was so worried, my brain must have gone wrong. It really doesn't matter much so long as I can get away from here. Life means nothing to me now, Mr. Chase, if they would only kill me I would plead guilty and have it all over — all over, but they wouldn't."

"Don't say any more to-day, Miss White, I will come back," said Halford, a dizziness coming over him. "Perhaps the jury may justify you under the circumstances."

When the jailer turned the lock Halford nearly fell out of the cell. He hurried down the aisle between the prison cells.

"Are you sick, Mr. Chase?" asked the jailer, as Halford sank momentarily into a chair to recover from the dizziness that was blinding him.

"I believe I am. I have not been feeling well for some time. Dr. Brewster has warned me several times. Have you any whiskey at hand? Just a drink, if you please. And tell Miss White I shall come back tomorrow. It's a pitiful story and a strange one," said Halford, going out the door. He called a cab and hurried to his room. His brain was whirling.

"Arda, Little Sunset, forgive me! Little girl, don't you hear me, forgive me," he cried out across a continent, again and again.

When Dr. Brewster came into the room Halford was sitting in a rocker. "What's wrong, old man? You are working too hard, worrying too much." He watched the man in the chair for several minutes.

"No, doctor. This came over me up at the jail.

It was a sort of a chill, I guess, though my head was burning like fire. You see, the girl in that tragedy wants me to defend her. I was over at the jail and the surroundings upset me."

"I heard of it, Halford. The whole Multnomah bar is congratulating you in getting the case. I believe a hundred of them called me up to ask where you were. Say, Halford, it is your chance to make a mark for yourself. If you win this case you are a made man."

Halford watched the eager face of his friend listlessly. "Win her case? You don't know what that would mean. You believe that twelve men would say that she was justified in killing him for what he done? Impossible!" Again Halford's brain whirled. That would convict him, place a death sentence over him, unexecuted, to haunt him always. His mind went to the faraway mountains of the north. He could see a girl there with a child in her arms. Little Hal was now four years old and his blood was in his veins. In Multnomah, his prided city, the sentence had been death self-executed and he was called upon to defend her. No, it was impossible that a jury could believe her justified. If they did he had no right to live.

"Aren't you going to take the case, Halford? It's your chance. But you can't go into it half-heartedly, believing that you are in the wrong. You must win it. It's the chance of a lifetime. It's the chance every lawyer in Multnomah is looking for and fortune brought it to you. Every one in this part of the state will hear of it. Your picture will

be in the dailies each day in a thrilling courtroom scene. Don't you catch the meaning of it, Halford — it means fortune, success!"

Still there was a lack of enthusiasm in Halford's face. To him it would mean failure, that he had failed as a man, that he was without honor.

"Do you believe a jury would acquit?" he finally asked.

"If I was on the jury there would be one that would," said Dr. Brewster. "I attended her, Halford. It's a pitiful case."

"You would acquit her, doctor?" Halford turned away.

"It's like this, Halford," continued Dr. Brewster, "Roberts was punishing the innocent, ruining the life of the innocent, still the law does not punish him. She was punishing the guilty, for there is no more guilty soul than his, still the law says she was wrong. A jury will catch the law's inconsistency and set it right. Take the whole affair into court. Take Robert's guilty soul into court. His last words were as Alice Macnamer bent over him, 'God forgive me.' Miss White had asked him to support the child that she might earn her own living, but he turned her away, destitute, ruined. Death would have been a more merciless offence. Take it all into court, Halford. Tears are the greatest pleaders in the world. I wish I had your chance."

Halford sat as if in a dream, fighting that specter of his own guilt. Dr. Brewster had accused him, but did not know that every word was a blade in his heart.

"Now don't go and get sick, break down and let

this chance slip, Halford. I will give you a tonic, and you brace up, old man, and show the world what you can do." Dr. Brewster smiled, then turned to the window.

"If I only had you for a witness, doctor!" said Halford.

"Sure, I shall be a witness for you. I attended her. Plead temporary insanity, resulting from desperation and an untimely motherhood, starvation — she was destitute the day I was there. That plea throws the doors wide open for evidence. I can honestly swear that her mind was unbalanced and rambling when I attended her. Heap up the evidence until the jury can see no clear way out except through acquittal. It's in you Halford, it's in your heart — sympathy and persuasion — I mean."

Still Halford was silent. "I will post you on medical terms applicable to such a case and also on the question of insanity." Dr. Brewster was warping enthusiastic.

Far into the night Halford thought of his strange case. Why it should come to him of all men he could not understand. The next morning he had recovered from his own aberration, and after returning from the city bastile did little that day but answer the telephone and receive congratulations.

"How did you come to get the case, Mr. Chase, just out of law school?"—"If you win this it means fortune."—"I believe you shall win it if you go after it hard, real hard."—"Roberts got just what was coming."—"Self-executed punishment isn't legal, but juries accept it at times."—"Remember the tears." These were a few of the words

which came to him over the telephone. Several of the bar visited him in person and the day was over before he was aware of it.

"Yes," said Halford Chase to himself, on the way home, "I must convict myself, and if the jury returns a verdict against me—" He did not realize that his own heart and soul had been revolutionized during the last few days, and that a hope was forming in his breast without his knowing and that it would change his life.

Chase went into every detail of the case eagerly and tirelessly. During the next three months he read several medical books on insanity, and secured the reported cases of all the great insanity defenses in the county. He poured over them, one picture always before him guiding him on: a picture of a lonely cabin, the face of a girl and a child over the dim horizon. It was as if Little Sunset were pleading the cause of the unfortunate, in behalf of the thing she had done.

Halford delayed the trial as long as possible so that his client might gain strength and recover from her mental worries, temporary insanity as he chose to call it. He sent Dr. Brewster to the cell each day to guard over her health, during those convalescent days. Several times he requested that consulting physicians attend with him. These men became valuable witnesses in consequence.

Then the day for the trial came and Halford Chase was more like a ghost than a man. Dr. Brewster had commenced worrying anew for the welfare of his friend. He was silently praying that Halford might get through with the trial without

physical and mental collapse. He must go to the country for a couple of weeks as soon as the trial was over.

At the opening of the trial the courtroom was packed, and eager listeners were sitting in the windows and standing at the rear and sides of the room looking over each other's shoulders. The jury were in their places; three attorneys were representing the rights of the state. Beside Halford sat the girl, with the child in her arms. Halford had succeeded in getting the child brought to the courtroom. Its presence would have weight, he knew. Often the jury turned to the desolate mother with a momentary glance. The judicial hammer had sounded.

Mrs. Alice Macnamer was the first witness for the state, and her story was briefly told. Halford asked her but one question, and the glances of the two never met.

"What were the last words of the deceased?" he asked.

Her reply was slow in coming and the calm that pervaded the courtroom sent the answer deep into the hearts of every person present.

"'God forgive me!'" Alice spoke those words as if they came direct from a pleading heart and were intended for the man who asked the question. It was a dramatic scene, and the impression was one that would not soon be erased from the hearts of those who were present.

The remaining witnesses for the state told brief stories, but Halford passed them by without question.

It was when Miss White, the defendant, carried the child to the witness stand in her arms that the

prosecution objected to the presence of the fatherless child in court. Halford now made his most effective plea for the mother and child, claiming that the child was in reality a party to the action, the lives of mother and child being inseparable. As Halford pled, the prosecution soon saw their mistake and were moving restlessly, for the jury was listening to Halford intently. Soon the state's attorney was nettled to his feet.

"We object to this plea to the jury at this time, your honor."

"You invited it; raised the question, Mr. Hale," said the court with a twinkle in his eye. It was not until the court interrupted Halford by sustaining the right of the child to remain in the courtroom and in its mother's arms that Halford resumed the trial.

Then came the long, pitiful story of the unfortunate girl. For three days she answered the questions put to her by the prosecution in cross-examination. They were seeking to prove her perfectly sane or to break her down completely. But often, very often, tears came to her defense and often momentary suspenses, caused by utter collapse, broke into the progress of the trial, which continued day after day. It took Halford three hours to read one of the hypothetical questions put to one of the expert witnesses. It had taken him and Dr. Brewster many weary hours to put that one question into proper language.

"Would the question of surroundings have anything to do with causing mental aberration, leading to temporary insanity?" Halford asked.

"It would," came the response.

Then Halford brought in witnesses to tell of the hovel in which the girl was compelled to live, friendless, much of the time; without food and penniless, after being driven from her room by an accusing landlady.

They told of her former happy life, and contrasted the two extremes in vivid colors. Those two years of love-making were laid bare before the jury; every visit to the parks and to the theater. Boxes of chocolate were counted and recounted, so were the kisses, and the first stolen one was counted many times. Then the day for the wedding was set, then postponed from time to time, for all of which Roberts had a very plausible excuse. It took just two days to present those happy engagement days to the jury.

For ten days the trial lasted. For two hours Halford Chase stood before the staring jury. Most of that time his eyes were filled with tears and he talked as if in a dream, but his words rang with sympathy and conviction, and they found recognition in men's sympathetic souls. For that two hours a face in the northern rim of the western horizon stood clearly before him. He was not pleading for the defendant in court, but for the child of his blood and the mother in the bleak, desolate waste. He was pleading to himself, battling the heart of steel, the twenty-two years that remained after the five generations. No one present could fail to feel the sorrow that he felt. Then something seemed to snap within him and smiling, the first smile that had come for four years, he straightened up, bowed to the jury and took his place

at the table beside the unfortunate mother and the fatherless child. Opposing counsel answered for three long, dreary hours; but the jury looked out of the windows to the smoky horizon across the city.

Then came the suspense, the ghastly suspense for the one accused, waiting for the verdict.

Still Halford was smiling. "They will be back in a few minutes; doctor, let us stay, let us wait for the verdict," said Halford.

"They may be out until morning," persisted Dr. Brewster.

"No," said Halford, "soon now, let us wait. We want it all over tonight. I know what the verdict is going to be."

"What, Halford?"

"Guilty."

"Guilty, Halford. I don't believe it. It will at least be a disagreement. They cannot ignore the rules of common and of primitive justice you set before them. Your speech was the greatest thing that ever happened, Halford, old man. I saw one of those shorthand men taking it down. I bet it is copied in the *Herald*. I thought you were going to break down before the end of the trial, but you stood up well."

"I never felt better in my life, doc," Halford smiled. "But here comes the jury. I told you, doctor, it would take but a few minutes. They haven't been out more than half an hour. I bet you a drink right after we go that it is guilty, doc."

"I take the bet. It's not a disagreement or they would have been out longer."

Many of the audience had waited. And as the

jury filed into their places a terrible silence came over the room. Still Halford was smiling contentedly, care-free.

The judge turned to the twelve men.

"You have reached a verdict?"

The foreman rose. "We have."

"What is it gentlemen, guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty."

A commotion went over the courtroom. The girl at Halford's side kissed his hand in thankfulness.

Halford turned a smile to her. "Give me no credit, Miss White. It was God's defense in the hearts of men. Thank Him in your own heart to-day."

Dr. Brewster was shaking Halford's hand. "I won the drink," he said ecstatically.

"No, I won the drink," persisted Halford.

Dr. Brewster looked at his friend, bewildered at his meaning.

"They have convicted me, doctor. The verdict is guilty. I knew it would be. I saw it in a picture of a face far away. She could not be mistaken. No, Little Sunset could not be mistaken, she would not deceive me. I was sure of it to-day."

"What are you talking about, what is the matter, Halford? Are you insane too?"

"Never so sane in my life as I am this moment."

Several of the city's bar came forward and shook Halford's hand in congratulations. "You have won a great victory," they said.

"Yes, I have won a great battle," said Halford. "Five generations and twenty-two years." They looked at him askance and soon Halford went down

the courthouse steps with the doctor at his side. "We can have two drinks, doctor, seeing we disagree on the verdict and that we have both won. But when we get home I will convince you that I was right." Halford was as playful as a child on their way home. He talked incessantly and laughed with many a hearty outburst of genuine humor. Dr. Brewster responded with affability, for he had begun to worry for his friend's health. To see Halford so jubilant was assuring, indeed.

"Now, doctor, about that verdict. Sit down and I will show you that the verdict was guilty."

Something in Halford's manner compelled obedience, and the doctor dropped into a chair.

"You remember, doctor," began Halford, "the story of the girl I told you about three years ago, the one I left in the Canadian north?"

"I remember very distinctly. So you have not forgotten her."

"The memory of her has come back very vividly. I did not tell you all the story. I want to tell you the rest now." He hesitated. "There was a child, a child like the one whose mother I have been defending."

"A child?" There was accusation in the tone.

"Yes, a child, doctor, *my* child. I refused to give him a name. I don't know why unless it was the five generations of pride in my blood and twenty-two years of vanity that held me back. I left them there alone in the Canadian north. She didn't kill me because I left her, but rode a horse all the way to Fairsville, four hundred miles, to acquit me of a crime of which I was innocent. All this distance she

carried the child I refused to give my name. Think of that, doctor. Thinking of it, doctor, has been the hard work which you warned me would bring on a spell of sickness. Since I got this case I have been realizing that I was a coward and a criminal. Think what a great little woman she was, Doctor. Little Sunset I called her for two years. Here in Multnoma a good, kind-hearted girl kills a man who served her as I did my Little Sunset. She came four hundred miles to get me out of trouble. I am thinking that I came near missing a lot out of life. I knew from the first that if the jury acquitted Miss White they would convict me. I never realized that a jury right here in Multnoma would justify the taking of a human life for that kind of provocation. To-day it has been made very clear to me. While they acquitted her they have convicted me."

"It was the way you put it up to them, Halford," said the Doctor with a strange, almost a condemning glare at his friend. Halford felt that a barrier had been raised between them.

"No, don't say that, doctor. It was not my defense. I was convicting myself all those ten terrible days, fighting back the relics of five generations and twenty-two years. I was fighting myself, my pride; I was fighting to make a man out of myself. I was fighting so hard, doctor, that you will never understand. It was Little Sunset's defense, her plea to the jury, her defense of my child and my honor, the defense of motherhood. I knew she would win, I knew she was right, for she would not lie to me. That is why I knew the verdict was going to be guilty.

"Yes, I was guilty, guilty as hell."

Still Halford smiled happily, watching the strange eyes of his friend.

"What are you going to do, Halford, take a life sentence out of it?"

"No, doctor, I am going to escape, break jail. I want life, I want to live. She refused to let me go back to her that day in Fairsville, because she said this life, Multnomah, was in my blood. It *was* in my blood, doctor. I came back to it, that is proof enough that my blood was seeping with the shame of it, the worst there is in it. No, doctor, I am going back into the north to win her, win her, I say. And if I come back here it will be because I have won the greatest woman in the world."

Doctor Brewster jumped to his feet. "Do you mean that you are going to quit the law, now, after the success you have made, the victory you have won."

"Just the success I want," smiled Halford. "I have won. I want her, I want to win her. It is the success I want. A girl who wouldn't kill a man for it but who would travel four hundred miles to save him. Success! Sure I want success. As soon as I can vacate my office I start; and if I never win her, you may never expect to see me again. I have won the greatest victory of my life, I have won myself."

"Suppose she is married to another."

Halford laughed loud and long.

"No, no, doctor, she is not married. She came near killing Freddy to prevent his taking her kisses that she might save them for me. No, my dear

doctor, she will not be gone that way. She is waiting for me still. It will be an offended love, one that I must conquer now after these four years of neglect. I know, or she would not have pled the case as she did to-day. I got to win her, I got to be the mate that calls this time, and she will answer."

Three days passed and Dr. Brewster accompanied his friend to the westbound train. When it pulled out from under the shed Halford was sitting at the car window. He raised the window and looked out smiling.

"Good-by, doctor! Good-by, Multnomah!" And he closed the window and the express crept out of view between the man-made cañon walls.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### AGAIN ON THE TRAIL

"Hallo, Blair! Hallo, Thompson!" Halford Chase stepped from the westbound and took the hands of the smiling landlord and the genial store-keeper in his.

"Well, if it ain't Dude Eastern come back! How are you, Mr. Chase?" said Thompson with welcome.

"I am going to equip another armoured cruiser, Thompson. Mackinaw, chaps, spurs, cannons and all." Halford looked up the river finger pointing into the dim horizon with a wave of emotion and pride.

"We got 'em, Mr. Chase. That's my store there, the brick one. Moved in this summer. Yes, Fish Lake is growing. Got the streets graveled last fall and Blair has put up a new hotel. You can see it there."

"All aboard for the Lake House! Get right in, Mr. Chase, going right up." Halford took the seat beside Blair in the hack and they turned up the street.

"See you tomorrow, Thompson," Halford shouted back as the hack rattled up the gravel street to the New Lake House built on the elevation overlooking Fish Lake.

That evening, after eating, Halford went down to the shore of the lake to the landing where he had once dragged a dugout canoe upon the beach. Standing here he watched the sunset and listened for the tinkle of a bell on the hillside, but there was no sound coming from the silent slope. At the rim of the lake was no tepee tent, still he watched and listened as if memory were bringing back echoes from that day when he had met Little Sunset here. From his lips came another whistle without the ring of armoured steel. He watched the sunset, the golden sunset of the west, and the tipping of the color pot on the jagged rim. For an hour he sat on the shore watching the ripple of the waters, and as if in answer to the song which had once come to him as he waited here long ago, he sang:

" 'Tis only the heart that calls to the mate,  
To guide the skiff calmly over the lake,  
Out of the storm.  
'Tis love alone that answers the call  
Be it one or the other in the end to fall,  
Heart-broken, forlorn."

With a heavy heart that was softened by a smile he turned away, going to the livery-stable to see Steve.

"I wish to get two horses for the trail, Steve," said Halford. "A saddle-horse and a pack."

Steve looked him over critically.

"You are Mr. Chase, ain't you? Got a horse of me six years ago. Ain't you the same man?" asked Steve.

"Remember it, do you, Steve?" Halford held

out his hand and Steve took it. "I want to leave just as soon as you can furnish the two horses, Steve," said Halford.

"Got you rigged up, Mr. Chase. I got the bay I sold you six years ago. Best saddle pony in the country. That's her right there, Mr. Chase."

"What, the bay I rode up north?" Halford stared at the horse in surprise.

"I want her, Steve," he said smiling. "How much do you want for her this time?" He went into the stall and stroked the velvety neck.

"She's all ready for you, Mr. Chase. Had her for two years. I guess she must be yours, Mr. Chase; bought her once, didn't you?"

Something swelled in Halford's breast.

"How did you happen to get her again, Steve. I am just crazy to get her back and you say she is mine."

"Woman left her here two years ago and said if you ever wanted her to let you have her. In the next stall is a pack you can have for forty dollars."

"A lady left the bay for me." Halford's face vibrated with sentiment and recollection. Arda knew he would come back. "She is waiting for me," he said to himself with exultation.

"Yes, Helen Lester left her here. And your saddle is here also and the bridle," said Steve. Another thrill went through Halford. Memories were coming back in swift realities.

"I will get them tomorrow, Steve." And he turned out of the door whistling to conceal the tumult he felt rising within him.

"Yes, Thompson, I am going north again."

Thompson's eye had a twinkle of understanding in it.

"Glad to see you back, Mr. Chase."

"You know what I want, Thompson. Two .45's and a 30-30 carbine, and three suits of that woven-wire underwear, socks and a pair of those shoes with hobnails. Grub for a single pack." It was soon arranged.

At ten o'clock the next morning Halford mounted the bay and started up the finger pointing to the dim horizon, whistling and smiling as he went, his face turned to the north against a cool, brisk breeze. Far up the finger he saw a spiral of dust curling into the sky; the day was July and very warm. He had tied the bell to the neck of the pack animal. She was jingling it proudly. Halford named her Black Belle before they had gone half a mile. The bay must also have a romantic name now in deference to his mission to the north.

Halford now saw that the spiral of dust was caused by a freight wagon and six horses and instead of only a trail there was now a well-beaten road up the finger.

"No, we can't get Sunset into your name," he said to the horse, "for Arda has got all the sunsets corralled. She has gathered them all into her eyes and her face."

The six-horse team came lazily down in a cloud of dust. Halford turned out of the road and raised his hand in salute and drew up on his reins.

"Freighting up Chilco way?" asked Halford, leaning over his saddle-horn.

"Up to the mines," said the driver, leaning back

on his reins to stop the leaders. "Draining a lake up in the Caribou country."

Halford started. Arda was draining the lake to take out the gold! "Quite a camp up there?" asked Halford with concern.

The freighter watched the disconcerted face of the stranger for a moment and then asked, "Going up to Chilco?"

Halford did not answer for a moment. "No, up to the lake. How do I get in?"

"Just follow the road — built it last summer — for about a hundred and fifty miles. Then turn into the trail to the right. You will find a sign on a pine, 'This way to Caribou.' Can't miss it. Takes you right to the lake. Several prospectors gone in already this season. I'll be coming up in a couple of days with a load. You might meet a pack train on the trail and you could go along with them," said the driver from his high seat.

"I think I'll hit it alone," said Halford, and he jerked on Black Belle's lead rope and started the Bay impatiently. Arda was draining the lake. "Perhaps it's going to make a difference. I was a fool not to come before." Black Belle pulled heavily on the lead rope and a blister was forming on Halford's soft hand. He jerked on the rope several times angrily, but it made no difference.

"Maybe she'll follow," he said. He jumped to the ground and fastened the lead rope into the lash rope of the pack. Mounting the bay he started, and Black Belle followed at the bay's tail.

"Didn't like to be led with a rope around your neck, eh? Well, I know how it is. I was led with a

noose for a long time. I got to change your name now, Black Belle. Tag Tail it is hereafter, and say 'Red Belle' is all right for the bay. Now we got all our names fixed for the trip." He settled back into his saddle and the three went up the trail.

Halford had not gone far when he discovered the reason of Tag Tail's rebellion at the end of the lead rope. She now began to steal the bunch-grass along the trail as she went, but never fell behind. The sixth day Halford turned into the trail at the sign-board marked, "This way to Caribou." The next day he met the pack train of which the driver had spoken. Twelve horses in all were packing provisions to Caribou for the coming winter. There were two men. The one in the lead was a stranger, but when the twelve horses had passed Halford in the trail, he saw that Freddy was bringing up the rear. The eyes of the two men met with a glare and Freddy's hand went to his hip. Halford smiled at the movement.

"I'll meet you up in Caribou, Dude Eastern, and we will settle yet."

"You never forget, do you, Freddy?" shouted back Halford pleasantly, and then again he whistled as Red Belle cantered up the trail hewn out of the thick-growing black pines.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### ARDA'S LOOKOUT

Halford Chase rode up the grassy slope to the crest of the ridge and looked down into the camp bordering the lake below. At least twenty buildings had been built to rob the nest of its romance and memories. He had hoped to find Little Sunset and the child as he had left them. The lake was glistening beneath the afternoon sun, and the three black rocks were just the same. Several people were passing up the single street of the new camp. He felt that they were intruding on his sacred rights. The cabin he had left four years ago was still standing as he had deserted it. That is where the curtain in his life's drama had risen. Now he was back to see the play through and he was wondering if the curtain had fallen. He trembled. For many moments, with the breeze whipping him, with cool lashes, he went over the past with vivid pictures before him.

Up the creek, at the falls coming over the rocks, he saw several men at work with shovels. They were robbing him of his dream, but what right had he to a dream? The past, his neglect, offended him, but now the five generations and twenty-two years were gone, and he had a right to his life.

Before starting down the ridge to enter the camp a memory compelled him to look up to Arda's look-

out, whose heights he had watched all that day coming up the trail. A flutter of black waved against the sky. His heart went into a tumult. Was Little Sunset on the lookout, waiting as she had once said she would always wait. He jumped from Red Belle, and let the two ponies range on the grassy slope. Then he started up the mountainside.

He hurried on until out of breath, then he was compelled to make his way slowly. Yes, it was Arda and she was just the same, perhaps sadder for the four years of his neglect. That was Little Hal with her, now a boy of four. What was it in his breast that was eager, so very eager. How he wanted to take them both in his arms!

They were playing a game of some kind, and to Halford came the clear childish voice and the mother's musical laugh. Yes, they were happy and neither of the two saw him. About two rods away he stopped to watch the game, much like that which is played the world over with marbles. Little Hal was enjoying it immensely, while Little Sunset sat on a rock directing the game. Halford afterward learned that the game was called "nugget."

Something about the size of a small marble which glistened in the sun was placed on a small rock, then in turn each shot at it with another small rock. The one that knocked the one off the rock won, and the loser had to put another in its place. Halford watched until tears came to his eager eyes and until every inch of him was trembling and agitated.

Then little Hal turned to him and stared in childish contempt at being disturbed at his play. Arda, seeing the course of Little Hal's steady gaze,

and knowing that some one was watching, turned also and the smile went quickly from her face. Halford stepped hurriedly to her holding her gaze, but something in her manner stopped him a pace away.

"You been watching us, Halford." There was little greeting in the tone, but Halford thought the wistful face trembled.

She had spanned those four years as if the past and present were separated by a single night.

"Yes, Little Sunset, I have come back to you. You knew I would come."

"No." Her manner was casual, as if he had stepped out of a yesterday's meeting. "Why have you come, Halford? What are you intending to do 'way up here? This is not your life." If she felt a returning emotion, a disturbing throb in her breast she concealed them from him. With her, at least, life was a settled fact. He had come too late. He felt the repulse, the cold indifference. She spoke as if to a friend whom she had met daily and took a kindly interest in. Some superior strength had given her complete control of herself.

"Didn't you expect me to come back — you knew I would come! Haven't you been waiting for me? It is just as I planned to meet you and Little Hal up here on the Lookout as you once said you would watch and wait for me."

She was listening to him, but the smile had something of the north in it, a north that stands aloft and has to be conquered and explored anew, a north which says, "You have to fight for your mate in the wilderness."

"I did for a time, Halford; perhaps it was more of hope than expectation. You have been gone so long—"

How could one hope forever when there were no promises?

"You had ceased to hope, Little Sunset, for my coming?" He watched her intently for the answer. Her hesitation brought a thrill of hope back to him.

"Yes, Halford." Still Halford thought her voice was not quite sure.

He looked into the broad ring of Arda's world. The broad ring was the same, there was no change. The desolation was the same, the waste was just as interminable. Except for the wound he had left, he knew that her heart was the same.

"I knew you would say that, Little Sunset, I knew you would. You have a right to say it." Little Hal was looking up at him inquiringly. He was wishing Halford would go.

"Let us play some more, mamma. Send the man away so we can play." He looked up pleadingly into his mother's face. She bent her head to the inquiring, childish, imploring eyes and put a gentle hand on his head. Halford watched her face vibrate. Would she send him away at Little Hal's request or would she permit him to stay — would the wish of the child separate them now — always, or would he some day be the connecting, the binding link?

"We will not play any more today, Hal. We will come back tomorrow." Was she giving him his chance now? Halford could not decide, so many

things went through his brain as if in a race for the end. The child said no more, the day was closed, he could only hope for the coming of tomorrow.

" You are not going, Little Sunset? The sun is an hour above the mountains and I have come all this way to see you and Little Hal. I have given you the right to think what you are thinking now, Little Sunset, but I have come back to claim him — Little Hal is mine — "

" I'm not his, am I, mamma? " said the child, indignantly looking up in appeal to his mother.

" No, Little Hal."

" I am just yours," he said, to have the question settled.

" Just mine," she answered him with a gentle caress on the head. Then he looked at Halford accusingly.

Halford Chase felt a flush mount to his face, one that came from the red blood in his heart and it made a pain all the way between heart and cheek. Those were the words he had hurled at her when he went away, " The child is yours," he had said; " no law makes it mine." Her answer came clear out of the past, as clear as if she were repeating it now, " Not even your honor, Halford." Now he had come back to answer her. He had made his choice once and his rejection had been forced upon her and the child. They had not even been given the choice of acceptance or rejection.

" It is not altogether a question of honor, Little Sunset, or of duty — " he was attempting to say.

" Neither was it a question of honor then, Halford."

"No, Little Sunset," he said in quest of her eyes on the rim of the world. "Nor was it a question of love altogether then or now. I loved you then; I love you still. It was and is a question of knowing myself."

Why was it necessary to ask if she would listen to him? The four years of life, wanting her every moment, yet afraid to come back, were forcing him on.

"Little Sunset, I have always been afraid, that is why I set up that armour of steel about my heart in defense. Five generations and twenty-two years were in that armour. It was cupid-arrow proof, yet I felt what was within me. I wanted to claim it, in unguarded moments I did claim it during those two years; I wanted more of your kisses but I forced them back. The ambition of my life was to be a lawyer, Little Sunset, but the armour forced it back. It forced back hope, ambition, love, everything I wanted and longed for. You broke the armour, but in my fear of five generations and twenty-two years I gathered the fragments together and set them in place. Nothing but the erosions of time, the constant hammering and havoc of what lay within me could wear it away. I went back home. You were right, Little Sunset, it was in my blood. I found my father dead in his chair, a pauper, ruined. The five generations were gone, still the twenty-two years remained. I took up the ambitions of my life as they had come into it and fought them one by one. The twenty-two years dictated my ambition for a profession. I went to law school and was admitted to the bar of my native state. I fought it, Little Sun-

set, but it had come into my life first and it seemed to stand between us, and it held the right of way in my life by some strange coincidence resulting out of the fear remaining. Then a terrible thing happened in Multnoma. A father denied his child and the mother as I denied you. She killed him for it, Little Sunset. She came to me for defense. I defended so, and while the jury acquitted her it convicted me. Still I was fighting the twenty-two years. I saw how I was wrong. It was your defense, your plea to the jury, Little Sunset, that saved the mother back there in Multnoma. I wanted to be convicted because I was beginning to see that I was wrong. Then love had its supreme way. The twenty-two years of pride and ambition were gone. I gave up the law to come to you and Little Hal. Little Sunset, I have fought it all back, every ambition, every hope, every fear that came out of it, that came between us. Now it's just you and Little Hal I want."

As he spoke he watched every line of her face. Now it was amusement that disturbed her recollections of the past, now it was hope building anew.

That great glow of light, that had made so many sunsets, turned to him, "I am glad you have won, Halford," she said.

He stepped quickly toward her with uncontrollable emotion. "You are glad I came, you will take me back?"

"No, no, Halford." She drew back in repulse. "I am glad you have become a man for your own sake, not mine."

He looked across the waste, then to her profile cut clear against the sky. It was as if speaking to the

silent, unanswering rim of the waste. "I see, Little Sunset. How consistent you are. During those few happy days we enjoyed together you saw in me only the heart and not the five generations. It was the heart you loved. Then it came to be the five generations you hated, which you now hate. I have only the heart of it left. You know you shall come to love it again when you are convinced that the other has gone and that I will treat you as my heart did before. It is just as it should be. I will have to call to you this time. I will have to win you now and I mean to do it."

Again the smile came to his face. She had listened to him through it all.

"Yes, I shall win you again, Little Sunset. I have come back to stay until I have won you, if it takes always."

"No, Halford, go back; don't stay here. This life wasn't meant for you. I will never answer you if you should call to the mate always. Go back where you belong, to your city, where they cast them in pairs. Why did you leave it? I could never answer you now."

Again he spoke to the profile against the sky. "You do not mean that you have given your answer to another?"

"No, no, Halford. I have nothing to give. You took it all and hurled it back. I have nothing to give; there is no answer I could make, not even to you."

"I knew there was no one else, Little Sunset. You have been waiting for me; you are waiting for me now or you would not be here at the lookout to-

day. I told you when I left that a woman had no right to call to the mate, only to answer. I was mistaken. I understand, Little Sunset; you would never answer again though your heart calls to me still and answers me still. No, you would never admit it again after what I have done." He looked away across the waste as if it blended in solace with his soul.

"I want to give you and Little Hal my name."

It seemed quite hopeless, still he did not lose hope. He knew she was in a repulsive mood, otherwise he would have stolen her kisses again as he did the night she had warned him to escape from Fish Lake. No, the past had made her very sensitive; he must wait until the way to her heart was opened to him.

Little Hal was pulling at Arda's hand. "Let us go, mamma."

She turned and started down the hill without a glance at Halford, holding tight to the tiny hand in hers. She was in a study, a thoughtful mood, but her face was turned full to the sunset glow in the west. That far away horizon might have gotten all its color and light from her face.

"I may walk down with you, Little Sunset?" he asked.

"I couldn't help your doing all that you have done, how could I help your walking with me now?" Still facing the west she walked on proudly. He divined that he could read all that she felt.

"If you tell me that I cannot, I will wait until you have passed over the ridge," he said considerately.

"There is no use of our being foolish about it,"

she answered. "Now that we understand each other, I have no desire to keep up a quarrel between us. If there is a barrier raised there is no use of our publishing it to every one by never looking across it." So Halford walked by her side. They went in silence, until they reached the ridge.

"The great thing is, Little Sunset, that I understand myself; and while I have come to know, you have come to misunderstand."

"Perhaps that may be as good an answer as any so long as we have agreed to have it continue so."

Had she made an armour about her own heart that he must shatter as she had broken his? He half believed she had, but there were no five generations and twenty-two years to combat. Yes, he would shatter it, and when the crisis came she would answer, acknowledge it as he was answering now.

Halford's horses had strayed back along the trail. Arda turned off the ridge to the camp. Once he thought to ask her if he might call at the cabin where he had left her four years ago, but recalling that she was in a negative mood and would answer him "no," he knew it would be better to take the privilege unbidden. Yes, he must steal her, like a pirate, and he felt that she would not resist; but to a question, her answer would always be the same. She had called to him and he had hurled it back; she had answered and he had hurled it back pitilessly. Pride would never let her answer again. He stood on the windswept ridge of the entrance trail watching her go down the hill. Soon the clear notes of a song came back to him.

“Once did I make the call to the mate,  
Dancing like silver over the lake,  
Out from the breast;  
Now 'tis the cry of love that is dying,  
Hate for the mate who went ruthlessly flying  
Away from the nest.”

Halford turned quickly and catching Red Belle rode leisurely into Caribou, and Tag Tail followed lazily to the hitching rack in front of the tavern.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### HELEN LESTER

Halford walked leisurely into the building, took one drink of whiskey, then turned out of the door and rode up the main street with Tag Tail's bell jingling close behind Red Belle. Several rough-clad miners watched him go with very critical eyes. The new arrival had not the manner of the prospector, and they observed him with mingled contempt and curiosity until he stopped at the end of the street, where he unpacked Tag Tail and pitched his tent.

While he cooked his supper over a camp fire the miners from the creek above the lake passed by his tent and observed him with slight interest, but they asked him no questions, which was to his liking, and he ventured no inquiries. They went first to the saloon and then to their cabins. There was silence in Caribou until eight o'clock, when he heard voices at the saloon. He strolled leisurely down the street, but seeing only a few hilarious miners within went to the store, where he purchased a few things for his breakfast at a startlingly high price. He saw nothing of Arda, so he turned back to his tent for the night.

The next morning after the miners had shambled back to the creek he went to the cabin to see Little Sunset. He was wondering what connection she had

with the draining of the lake, and his business in Caribou had to do with her alone. Finding no one at the cabin he went down to the saloon tavern and stepped leisurely to the bar.

"Have a drink with me?" said Halford, meeting the gaze of the man across the bar.

"Jest arrive in Caribou?" asked the man pleasantly, scanning him more than was courteous, Halford thought.

"Last night," Halford answered. "Who is operating this scheme of draining the lake for gold?" he asked, pouring out his drink.

"W'y, a woman —"

"Oh!" said Halford in surprise. "You mean Arda."

"No; her name is Helen Lester. Arda's mother, I believe. Costing a good bit of money, but it will pay big, they say. Brought a lot of prospectors into the hills, and they all drift into camp now and then."

Halford could not conceal his surprise. Arda had said her mother went down the Mackenzie and had never returned. Had there been some mistake, had the north given her back too late to find the man after the common law had bound them as man and wife?

"Lives here in Caribou, I suppose?" said Halford, stepping back.

"Oh, yes, in the house up the street with the porch in front. Clever woman she is, all business. Helen Lester and her daughter are the only women in camp as yet. She manages the whole thing herself." Still the saloon-keeper watched him intently, as with an

effort to decide what might have brought him into the north.

Halford took another drink and strolled down toward the lake. Watching the calm waters for some time, he saw a woman go up to the flat above the rim of the lake and enter the house with the porch in front.

That was probably the reason he had not found Arda at the cabin. She was doubtless living with her mother. He turned back up the slope and went direct to the house where the woman had entered and rapped.

"Come in," came a pleasant though very firm voice. It was a woman's voice, and it rang with the wilderness.

Halford paused a moment, then pushed the door open and entered. Helen Lester had turned from the table where she was sitting. It was a once pretty face, but the roughness of the bitter north had slightly hardened the features. Hardships were still visible, yet the face was pleasant, and Halford fancied a smile came to the deep blue eyes as a greeting. It was the face now that one would admire and respect rather than love.

"This is Mrs. Lester?" asked Halford.

"It is."

"My name is Chase," said Halford, slightly uneasy in the presence of Arda's mother.

"How do you do, Mr. Chase?" she said in welcome, coming forward, and extended a firm clasp in his. "Take a chair, sir." She went back to her own. "You are not the kind of prospector we usually meet with in Caribou." She searched him in-

tently. Halford was wondering if she knew that he was the father of Arda's child. "I take it for granted that you are a prospector, for gold is the only inducement in the north."

"Oh, no, it isn't." This thought came instantly. He said, "Perhaps not the kind of prospector one usually finds, Mrs. Lester, but I intend to do a little searching for gold this summer. The business is entirely new to me."

"I would guess as much." Her keen vision went straight into his. He evaded it for a moment, conscious of the fact that he did not fit into place here. He believed now that Arda had kept his secret.

"I came to see about building a cabin in Caribou, Mrs. Lester. I understand that you own most of the ground here." Again there was a quizzical expression in her face, perhaps it might be suspicion, but she soon dispelled his doubts.

"W'y, certainly, Mr. Chase. Build right here next to mine if you care to. This is a free country. But I fancy the winters in Caribou will get rather monotonous, if they do not drive you out altogether. They are long and dreary. Most of the prospectors leave for the winter; perhaps you intend to do the same."

"I do not intend to," said Halford. He might have added that only one thing would drive him away — Arda's going — but he did not. He could find no suspicion, no accusation in her searching, critical glances. Could it be that Arda had never told her of him and those two years in the cabin up the narrow street? Just what did Helen Lester suspect when she found Little Sunset here with a child?

"Mrs. Lester, if you have the time I wish you would tell me, show me, I mean, just where I may build the cabin. I don't want you to think I wish to impose upon you."

"You intend to live alone, Mr. Chase?" She searched him again with evident approval.

He nodded. Helen Lester rose from her chair and led the way to the vacant space to the south of the house.

"Mr. Chase, right here would be a good place." She stood about thirty feet away from her own building. "It is not close enough to endanger my place by fire, and I really wish you would build right here." She looked up with a pleasant smile. Halford fancied that he liked Arda's mother. "Don't think, Mr. Chase, that I would grant the privilege to every one. I believe we may get along side by side, and it may prevent some objectionable person from demanding a refusal of me."

Halford was now searching the house for a picture of Little Hal framed in one of the windows telling that Arda was here, but neither that or a sound of his clear voice came to him. No. Arda could never have told Helen Lester of him. What had the child told this woman of the past?

"I thank you very much, Mrs. Lester. I will begin work tomorrow if I can get a man to help me."

"It is really a favor to have you build here, Mr. Chase. It may save me a very disagreeable encounter in the future, and I am sure we may get along as neighbors. Most of the men who come here are so very rough, and they can annoy one terribly. They are as a rule kind and respectful, but the north

has gotten into them —” She stopped abruptly. A flush came to her face. “Perhaps I ought not to have said that. I suppose I am not what you are used to seeing in a woman, Mr. Chase. I have been in the north for many years, and it takes away the finer lines.”

Halford was about to disagree with her, but restrained. If Helen Lester had repelled the roughness of the north, Little Sunset had absorbed the innocence and simplicity and grace of it; the romance and the inspiration of it. He was wondering where Little Sunset might be. Perhaps she had gone to the lookout again with Little Hal, as she had promised. Helen Lester turned to the house. Halford caught her step and they were walking back slowly. Often she looked up to him pleasantly, smiling.

“ You spoke of it being very lonesome here. Your daughter is with you? ” ventured Halford.

“ Oh, no. She stays at her own cabin, with Little Hal, which Tom and I built many years ago. I built this house, if it may be properly classed a house as distinguished from a cabin, thinking she would come here to stay with me, but she refused.”

Halford did not give Helen Lester a chance to search his eyes now. Arda was living with the memory of him. A thrill went through him. “ Some sentimental idea of Arda’s, perhaps. I have respected her wish to live alone, though we visit each other very often, and Little Hal —” Again she stopped suddenly, with a sigh almost of distress.

“ It is very strange of her,” said Halford, looking away.

“ She is perfectly able to look after herself. It’s

no disrespect for me I am sure, Mr. Chase. We are very fond of each other and of Little Hal." She always stopped at the mention of the child's name. Again Halford wondered just how much she knew and how much was prompted by mystery.

"She is not at home today?" ventured Halford. He was determined to know why Little Sunset preferred to live alone in the cabin where he had left her. He was sure now that Helen Lester knew nothing of the part he had played in that long drama of two years that had so much of tragedy in it.

Helen Lester turned to him with a smile.

"You wished to see her, you stopped at her cabin?" It was a whimsical glance she gave him as if to say, "You are not the first man who has wished to see Arda." A proud smile came over her face. The man before her was different, and she felt it a compliment for this man to speak of her daughter, perhaps in a way that told of fascination.

"Yes," said Halford.

"You have met Arda; you knew her before coming here?"

"Yes," answered Halford, with a tingle of guilt running through him.

Halford did not know just why he did it, but he followed Helen Lester back to the house and entered, seating himself. Perhaps her manner was an invitation.

"Arda comes and goes. She went with Little Hal early this morning on horseback. They may come back tonight; it may be a week. I do not worry over them. She knows the hills. Really, Mr. Chase, I often call them Arda's mountains."

He gave a slight start. She saw some of the thing in Little Sunset that he had seen. He had often called them Arda's mountains when he was here.

"I don't quite understand her going this time, Mr. Chase. She said nothing about it to me until early this morning, after she was ready to leave."

Halford's gaze went across the waste.

She asked, "You came only last night?"

"Yes," said Halford thoughtfully.

"You might have seen her then had you known she was going away. I am sure she would have been glad to have seen an old acquaintance."

"I did see her, Mrs. Lester, for a few moments." Indeed, they were only a few moments when he wanted her so badly for a whole life. "She was up on Arda's lookout," said Halford.

"Arda's lookout?" Helen Lester's glance went to him so quickly that he could not turn away to conceal his embarrassment. That was one of the secrets of four years ago. "Where is that, Mr. Chase?" Halford was evidently confused. He had betrayed one of Little Sunset's secrets unwittingly, a part of the sentimental plan to live alone. He felt a color burning on his face.

"She has never told you. She calls the mountain up from the camp that."

"She named it after herself?" came incredulously. "How strange, Mr. Chase. We generally name our delightful, our romantic spots after another's name. Are you sure she named it that?"

Again Halford was disturbed. He had named the place, christened it in those happy days, "Arda's lookout."

"That is what she called it last night," said Halford.

"You saw her up there — you went up there to see her — as you came into Caribou?"

Halford did not answer; his embarrassment was more than he could conceal.

"I am keeping you from your work, Mrs. Lester." Halford rose, took his hat and twirled it restlessly in his hand.

"I am not very busy, Mr. Chase. I am glad you came."

He hurried out and went rapidly down the street.

Helen Lester watched him go, very thoughtful. Several impressions went running wildly through her mind. His being so anxious to see Arda — his going to the lookout to see her on his way into Caribou — the lookout was Arda's one memory spot, and she went there very often — he had sought her out at this place almost as if expecting to find her there — a flush had come to this man's face, a restless mood swept over him — Arda's lookout — was she so egotistical as to give a frequented spot, a memory spot, her own name — Arda's hurrying away from Caribou the very next morning after his arrival — his coming to her — yes, he had been disconcerted. She watched Halford Chase far down the street, then turned thoughtfully to the table where she had been working, but finally pushed the paper away, leaned back in her chair and closed her eyes.

## CHAPTER XXX

### ARDA DOES NOT RETURN

As soon as Freddy returned to Caribou, much to Halford's distaste, he became known in the camp as Dude Eastern. It was, perhaps, this dub that prevented his mixing more with the miner population. He occasionally went to the saloon for a drink, and for a short chat with the owner, who was the daily newspaper at Caribou. Often he went to Helen Lester's "house," as it was differentiated from the miners' cabins. It was evident to Halford that a suspicion of his relation with Little Sunset would soon pervade the mining camp. The story would soon get to Helen Lester, and he must be the first to tell her.

Freddy had three pals and their conduct, their insulting manner soon distinguished him among Caribou's population. In time this gained for Halford Chase sympathy and friends.

Often Halford went up the creek to the placer diggings to watch the men at work. An old miner called Halford aside one day and said: "Mr. Chase, you got to watch them fellers fer they intend to git you."

"It is very plain to me, Charlie," said Halford. "I have known Freddy's intentions for six years."

"Mr. Chase, be careful, keep ready. They are too cowardly to kill you in cold blood. They intend to provoke you, insult you, ketch you some time in

a crowd when you ain't expecting it. The moment you reach for your gun they git you."

"Yes, I understand, Charlie. That is Freddy's way. He won't take a chance, fight in the open, man to man."

"All right, Mr. Chase. I wanted you to know. Better take to heart a few things rather than to be a dead man, for you got no chance with the three of them. You're not a gun man."

"Thank you, Charlie," said Halford, as the old miner turned toward the creek.

Halford Chase was alert. Two months went by and Little Sunset did not return. Her negative mood had been set with determination. He had talked the problem over with Helen Lester many times. Very often he was a visitor at her house.

"I thought you came here to prospect, Mr. Chase," said Helen Lester one day, when Halford called at the house.

"So I did. I have been talking with all the old miners about the probable place to search for placer, and I have been learning how to pan the gold out of the sand."

Helen Lester smiled whimsically. It was plain that she was leading to a more serious problem and one that concerned her as well as the Easterner.

"W'y, you ought to learn how to pan gold in a few hours, and gold is where you find it, Mr. Chase—"

"Where you don't find it, Mrs. Lester," corrected Halford.

"There are no rules to work by, no school except that of experience and to keep on digging."

Halford smiled in answer. Helen Lester looked out of the window to consider her inquiry. Halford watched her vibrating profile.

"What is this whisper, Mr. Chase, that Freddy has started —"

"About his killing me? Oh, that is nothing," said Halford uneasily.

"Mr. Chase, it must have started from something in the beginning. However, I refer to the rumor that you came here to win my daughter." Halford shot a glance to the desolation with coloring cheeks.

"It is useless, Mr. Chase. I am sure no one will ever win her. A disappointment prevents. She holds the memory of the past a sacred, a very sacred thing."

"She has told you?" questioned Halford.

"I have been putting things together. I guessed some time ago that it was not prospecting alone that brought you here. You are no prospector. Her determination to remain at the cabin, her sad, even melancholy manner at times has spoken in no uncertain way. Arda's lookout was never named by her, but by him." Halford thought Helen Lester's intent eyes too inquiring, too searching.

"You think it hopeless, then?" This was plain admission, an acknowledgment of the things in his heart.

"You admit the whispers, that you came for that very purpose?"

"Just as well admit the truth, Mrs. Lester. I did come for exactly that and nothing more. The prospecting business was my excuse for being here," he said frankly.

"Better forget about it. Go away, Mr. Chase." Halford thought the situation over for many minutes. Arda had, indeed, gone to show her contempt for him.

"But suppose the man himself should come, return for her?" he ventured.

The woman's eyes rounded with a startled rim of white. She trembled, rose from her chair, bent toward him, speechless.

"Would you then say it was hopeless?" asked Halford under the condemning eyes, but he dared not turn. He must brave it out.

"Mr. Chase, are you the man?" burst from her lips. Halford now met the gaze of the mother squarely. He must win this woman's sympathy.

"I am."

Helen Lester sank down in a chair in realization of the acknowledgment. Still she did not condemn him, now that he had come to repair the past.

"I have often wondered about Little Hal," she half wailed.

"She thought we were married, Mrs. Lester. I took her in the same way that Tom Lester took you many years ago, in the primitive north. In honor it bound Arda, but not me. I was at fault. I was the coward."

The mother's eyes were in a trance, a dream. While she looked at the floor with centered gaze, Halford Chase told her of his life: the five generations and the twenty-two years, his chosen profession which he gave up because of the five generations, of his engagement with Alice Fairmount, of his coming west and meeting Little Sunset at Fish Lake, of

Freddy's threat and the gunshot. Arda's bringing him here to the cabin, of his wounding her in that insane moment, of the shattering of the steel about his heart, his gathering it up again to protect the tender sentiments of love he felt for Arda so repulsive to the five generations and the twenty-two years, of those terrible days in Caribou Meadows, of the child and his leaving, of the arrest at Fish Lake and the trial at Fairsville, of Arda's coming to his defense, of his going home and his chosen profession and the defense of the girl at Multnoma and how he had convicted himself. He laid his whole life before this woman in justification. It was a long story, and not once did Helen Lester's eyes turn to him, but she was listening, always listening. When he had finished, a silence demanded a word from the woman in accusation or of sympathy and she said, "So that is why Arda went away when you came."

"And that is why I am waiting for her return. I will wait for her always or go out into the wilderness in search of her. I mean to win her back, Mrs. Lester. Arda gave me the life that is worth living, but for her I should never have found myself."

"I am afraid you ought to have come back sooner, Mr. Chase." Still Halford watched the casing beyond her face. He saw sympathy in her pointless gaze.

"She will come back, Mrs. Lester; I know she will, for she loves me even now. I know it, I saw it the day I came back when we met on the lookout. I named it that, because she told me she would watch for my return that first time I went. She believed in me then, but afterwards four years of disappointment

have shown her the hardness of a heart of steel. The steel is gone. She will come back to see if I really intend to win her. I know she will. It is that which keeps her away. She thinks I will go back home, but if I wait and she finds that my heart of steel is gone, she will let me win her. She often spoke of my heart that way, saying it was in my blood. I didn't understand what she meant until the fight came. W'y, Mrs. Lester, you believe she loves me; the sacred memory of the cabin is but offended love. After all I have done, she loves me. She has a true heart, Mrs. Lester."

"Perhaps you may succeed, Mr. Chase. Yes, Tom and I were married that way, but Tom would never have done what you have done, deserted me."

"No; five generations were not in his blood."

"Perhaps not, Mr. Chase."

"How about you, Mrs. Lester? Didn't he hold it against you, your leaving him and the child way up north while he was sick?" said Halford.

She looked up quickly. Twenty years of memory were on her face and held it set and firm. She was pleading for justification also.

"Tom must have told Arda."

"Yes. You might have found it hard to have won him back."

"I was not at fault, Mr. Chase. I was out in the dugout fishing. I lost my paddle and fell into the hands of Indians after drifting all one night. Tom and I and Arda were then on our way to the discovery that took my brothers' lives. We hoped to take out enough gold to drain the lake here. Tom was taken sick. I went to the river to catch fish. I lost

my paddle and was held by the Indians for more than a month. When I escaped Tom and Arda were gone. Yes, they thought I had left them to die. I searched year after year, but Tom wandered much. I came back here once, but he was still farther north seeking gold to drain the lake. I always inquired from every prospector I met but no word ever came from him. You see Tom did not know where my brothers' claims were. I gave up trying to find him and Arda. I went back year after year and worked the claims until I had saved enough to do the work we had planned so long. I hoped to find him here some time, but when I came two years ago only Arda was waiting for me, waiting alone with Little Hal."

"She would have braved it always if you or I had not come," said Halford.

"Yes, always," said Helen Lester. "Here, in memories, as if waiting for you."

Helen Lester walked to the window opposite, looked into the distant peaks, mile after desolate mile of them. Memory shot out on the listless, tearful gaze. Finally she turned to Halford.

"Perhaps you may succeed, Mr. Chase," she said.

## CHAPTER XXXI

### THE CARIBOU SANTA CLAUS

It was said in Caribou that Dude Eastern had found "colors," and it was true that he had found a creek that ran gold. He had been in the hills for about six weeks, feeling that it was useless to wait for Arda's return as long as summer lasted. She would come back when winter set in, he was sure, in a belief that he had gone away.

Freddy was busy with the pack-train and spent only a night out of two weeks in Caribou, which night Halford remained at his own cabin. He had no taste for an open encounter with Freddy and his pals. He was not a gun man, and he realized his disadvantage. The pals continued their insults when chance brought them together, which was not often.

They were peaceful days in the mountains, hopeful, without fear of Freddy. It was the first snow that drove Halford back to Caribou. Still Arda had not returned. Halford feared that she had left for good, but one day through a foot of snow she entered the camp from the north.

When winter came in earnest Freddy and his pals left Caribou with many others, and the camp was partly deserted. By springtime Halford had hoped to win Little Sunset and leave with her and Little Hal, but she was impervious. Not once had he

gained admittance to her cabin; only once had he been permitted to speak to her a morning's greeting.

Between Halford and Little Hal an armistice had been declared, and he often led him down the street to the store to send him home with a sack of candy in his proud little hand. Once he had coaxed him to his cabin and they had talked for more than an hour, still Little Hal was timid and cautious in his father's presence, and Halford wondered if Little Sunset were not afraid that he might win the child's affections and confidence. She was perhaps warning the child against him.

Halford Chase was in the store one day not long before Christmas when several of the miners who had remained in camp were buying trinkets and toys.

Halford smiled and asked, "What are you men going to do with toys way up here in the snow?"

"W'y, there's a kid in camp. We are going to make a Christmas for Little Hal. He is the only kiddie in camp, and he's got to know there's a Christmas in Caribou."

An idea grew into being in Halford's brain. He bought ten yards of red flannel and four yards of cheap white fur for trimmings. The miners looked on in amazement for a moment, and then a laugh brought a flush to Halford's cheek.

"What are you going to do with it?" asked one of the miners. "You been askin' a question about our toys."

"If there is going to be a Christmas in Caribou there must be a Santa Claus." They each gave Halford a casual glance, understanding the growing eagerness and disappointment on his face. They de-

clared themselves bound to secrecy. They suspected that it was to get admittance to Arda's cabin that he was prompted into this aberration.

Christmas eve Halford Chase sat by his window watching the snow. It was about seven o'clock when the miners went to Arda's cabin, marching up the narrow trail. They remained about ten minutes, and then came out and went back to the saloon. He could see them plainly, for the glitter of the moon on the snow made a world of shining silver. That line of ten men included his friends in Caribou, and his heart swelled with admiration for the respect they had shown Little Hal.

When they had entered the saloon he stepped out of his own cabin door with a pack on his back, and hurried silently up to Arda's door and rapped, slipping the mask over his face as he did so. Arda came across the floor and opened the door cautiously as if expecting him. Watching him for a moment she threw the door open and he stepped in, a tumult surging through his breast, hammering ecstatically — there was no ring of steel. Halford did not speak until he was safely within and the door had been closed behind him. Arda called Little Hal, who came running from his room barefooted in his pajamas. At the bedroom door he stopped abruptly, with frightened eyes gazing at Halford, then he turned to his mother for assurance.

"I'll bet he's got something for you, Little Hal." Still the child was doubtful and scanned Halford and his pack critically, with disapproval. Halford drew the pack-strap off his shoulder and took a gun from the bulging sack. Little Hal's eyes brightened.

Halford knew that the mesmeric effect of his strange garb would prevent the child from recognizing his voice.

"I saved this gun for you, Little Hal," said Halford, with a glance toward Arda. A cloud went to her brow, and she sank down into a chair. It was plain that he had played this trick upon her to gain admittance to the cabin.

Little Hal stepped closer as Halford held the gun out to him. He finally reached for the gun and taking it in his hand stepped away again at a safe distance from Halford. Looking the gun over in amazement he finally said, "Will it shoot?"

"Let us try it," said Halford pleasantly.

Again Little Hal went closer and gave the gun back to Halford who loaded it with a rubber ball and taking a bear from his pack set it on the table. Taking aim he pulled the trigger and the bear tumbled to the floor. Little Hal gave a cry of delight and picked up the bear. Standing it on the table again he searched for a moment about the room and brought the bullet back to Halford.

"You got to learn to shoot, Little Hal. Try it." The child's fear was gone, and he stood in front of Halford and aimed long and carefully, but the bear did not fall.

"You got to have practice, Little Hal, then we can go hunting some day."

"With you?" asked Little Hal enthusiastically.

"Sure, with me."

"Do you hunt bears?"

"Yes. Won't you go with me?"

"Did you ever kill a bear?"

"Lots of them."

"Will you get me a big gun so I can kill one if I'll go with you?" asked the child with wide eyes.

Halford glanced at Little Sunset, who sat gloomily watching and listening with evident dismay. Discomfort was plain on her face. Halford was trying to win the child from her. A flash came to the condemning eye.

Finally Halford took the child on his lap, took out a drum and a whistle, two sacks of candy and a football.

"What is it?" asked Little Hal taking the football, looking at Halford.

Halford inflated it and told Little Hal to kick it. For a few moments he played while the mother sat gloomily watching. Soon he took the drum. Halford thought a mist was gathering in Little Sunset's eyes, a mist that often softens a heart.

Soon Little Hal went back to the gun. No words had passed between Little Sunset and Halford.

"Now, Little Hal," said Halford, "we ought to plan that hunt for the spring when the bears come out. What do you say?"

"All right," said the child confidently.

Arda's eyes flashed disapproval.

"Hadn't you better go home with me so we can plan it together?" said Halford pleadingly. "You see, we want things all prepared, and I want you to help get the grub and the guns ready. You can practice shooting with me."

"All right," said Little Hal, with a quick glance at his mother. "You got lots of things where you live, ain't you?"

"Just heaps of them, Little Hal — everything you want."

"Get my clothes, mamma. I want to go with the funny man and get lots of things, and go hunting with his big guns and kill a bear."

He waited for his mother to get his clothes, but she bent her face down and into her upraised hands. Was it anger and rebellion or tears that held her silent? They were tears, for she finally jumped up defiantly with a struggle to gain control of herself and her voice trembled.

"Would you take him away from me now, after you refused to give him your name, deserted him and I? He's all you gave me in return for those two years, Halford."

"Little Sunset, you want Little Hal to hate me. You think I haven't paid a penalty for what I have done. You won't let me love him — or you. Little Sunset, don't you see, don't you understand? Little Hal wants to go with me."

"But you can't take him away from me. He is mine, he is all I got. You said he wasn't yours." Her voice was breaking with emotion.

"Let him be *ours*. He would go; won't you come with him, Little Sunset — won't you come with him and me? I want you both; I want Little Hal, I want you. We belong to each other. I ought never to have gone away, but don't you see how necessary it was for me to go? You wouldn't have wanted me the way I was then. I had to go to get rid of the heart of steel. I loved you then, even then. You only saw the love I had for you, but the heart of steel

was there and it forced back your love, your call to me. Little Sunset, I have come back for you both. I want to give you my name, I want Little Hal to have a name."

As he pled tears came to her eyes and dropped into her hands, and she trembled as if in fear of herself. Little Hal was watching the turn things had taken with disappointment.

Arda, finally, gathered Little Hal up in her arms jealously and kissed him. "You can't go, Little Hal; you must stay with me. He would go away and leave you some time and you would have no place to go," she said accusingly. She kissed him again and again, holding him protectingly in her trembling arms.

"You think I would do that? Perhaps you have the right to say it, to hurt me. You think I have not endured enough. Yes, I can endure more, much more, Little Sunset, but you shall pay me for it with kisses in the end. I will not take Little Hal from you, but I want to share his love with you. He belongs to us both."

"No, no, he is mine."

He tried to look into her face and eyes, to plead from his very soul, but she evaded him with jealous glances toward Little Hal. Tears were still in her eyes, but they were tears of fear. She half thought that he had come to take the child from her, to take his love and leave her desolate.

"Little Sunset, do you always intend to rob me of him? Don't you want me to share the happiness he will bring?"

"Oh, Halford, go away; go back to your city. Let us be happy; it would be only a matter of time —"

"Little Sunset, don't say that. You thought I would go back if I could not see you this summer, but I did not. I am going to stay here always, until I win you back. It has taken four years to lose you, Little Sunset —"

He hesitated, but she made no answer.

"You loved me even that day in Fairsville, didn't you?" he said.

"Oh, Halford, go — won't you, please — yes, I loved you even then. I would have gone with you then, if only you had told me that you would try to win me back to you, but you did not. You must go now. You have come back too late."

He stepped quickly toward her, and took her hand from the arm of the chair. "Little Sunset, it was my mistake, but I thought I belonged back there. I wanted you then, I wanted you as I want you now, but I hadn't found myself, I hadn't gotten it out of my blood. It's gone now, all gone."

She was staring down at the floor to evade the eager, pleading gaze. Little Hal had fallen asleep and lay quietly in her caressing arms. Together, for the first time they watched the sleeping face as he knelt down before her.

"I knew it after I went away, Little Sunset, that you would have gone with me. It has taken me four years to lose you; I am going to win you back in less time. You say there is no one else — then you and Little Hal belong to me. Little Sunset, you

remember the night I told you I was your mate and you said the same to me?"

"Yes, Halford, I remember, but let us not talk about it. It is so very far away, it has gone so far into the past. I have tried so hard to forget that day; please don't bring it back."

"Yes, that was more than four years ago. You accepted my word then, you thought we were married under the code of the common law —"

"God's code, Halford, the code of love and honor," she corrected, trying to draw her struggling, trembling hand from his, but he clung to it as if it might weld a span between their hearts, the span that once he had broken. He dare not let her go now, for he was rending her very soul, and he felt that she must submit to the demands of memory and love.

"He did join us then for always, Little Sunset; we were married then, we belong to each other now, you are as much mine now as then. God's law says that no one shall separate what he has joined together. You accept that law of His also, don't you, Little Sunset?"

"Yes, Halford. No one is separating us. There is no other, never will there be for me. It meant always to me that day, it means always to me still; but when you went away, I knew we must live apart. Your world was far away, so very different from mine. Let the union of love be just the same —"

"You love me, then; you acknowledge it now," he said, trying to draw her to him.

"No, no, Halford. Not that way, not that way. We are bound by the love we had then, just the same,

but, Halford, won't you go away and leave me — Little Hal and I?"

He sank back. He kissed her hand and let it fall to the arm of the chair again. His plea was as earnest but not so passionate now, that he saw he could not overwhelm her with emotions.

"Little Sunset, go back over those days at Fish Lake when we met at your tepee tent by the lake, the day when you were saving your kisses all for the picture — I want them now."

"You took them all, Halford."

"Not all, Little Sunset — you still have the picture?"

"Yes, just the picture. I have a right to that because I made it, and you could not take it away with you." He had thrown the mask aside now, and was standing before her watching the face turned down to Little Hal's. That was his picture now. Little Hal's blood was part of him, he was part of the picture now.

"Little Sunset, let us go back over those days, the happy days we had four years ago. Let us live them over again. I know you are not happy here living alone. Your mother says that you refused to go to her; she told me all about it. You are trying to live by the memory of our happy days alone, but you can't, Little Sunset. I told your mother about our two years, that I had come back to win you. You think of those two years, don't you, Little Sunset? That is why you stay here alone. Your mother thought you were waiting for me to come back. How long did you wait, Little Sunset, before you gave up hope and turned against me?"

"It is so long I have forgotten. I am not waiting now."

"You think I will go back again without you?"

Instead of answering him she took Little Hal to his bed and laid him down, then she came back. Halford paced the floor, took up the mask and twirled it in a troubled mood. Finally he went to her again and held out his hand. She looked up at him quizzically.

"Won't you take it, Little Sunset?" he asked.

"You mean to say good-by?" She stepped toward the extended palm.

"Only to say good-night," he said, as her hand went into his.

"Good-night, Halford." Her glance was forced to the floor.

He held it in his with a slight pull to draw her near. His eyes were burning on her face.

"Won't you come with me, Little Sunset?" His voice was deep, trembling, pleading, and the words made only a faint sound on his lips.

Her head again shook in a determined negative.

He went on. "Let it always be just sunset between us," he said, "as it was then, never night, night that you are making for both of us. Are you going to make it always night, little girl?"

"You made it night for me, Halford."

"But I am willing to make it morning again, a new day if you will only wait with me, for the sunset to come again, then we shall stop the running of time. Will you do it?"

"I did not make the night."

A smile of hideous doubt and fear flitted across his face, a hopeful smile chased it away.

" You are not saying that out of revenge, are you? " She did not answer.

" I understand you, Little Sunset. You are willing for the morning and another day to brighten into another sunset for us, but I must make them. When I have done so you will not resist. You mean that I may win you again if I can. Isn't that what you mean? " She stood silent.

" You answered me once and I hurt you for it; you will never answer me again. Wouldn't you like to have the sunset days back? " he asked.

" How could I help but want them back? I never made it night for us. You have no more sunset days to give, Halford," she said with vehemence.

" I know. It is my night and we are sharing it together. It has been long, very long, too long; it's past time for another day. I am going to make you see the light of it, Little Sunset. Before long I am going to steal another kiss as I did that night you warned me of the officer's coming. That was the beginning of that other day, wasn't it, Little Sunset? "

" Maybe it was, Halford, but night came so suddenly after that, that I hardly remember."

" I am going to steal another. I knew you would never consent, you would not have consented then. You are more negative in everything. I have simply got to steal what I get, force it upon you. Then, perhaps, another day will begin." His words came almost threateningly and they rang with truth. She held her face down and he felt the muscles of her hand in his harden to make resistance. She must have felt that the emotion, the passion in him was

planning for an unguarded moment to steal it then.

"Don't be afraid, Little Sunset, I am not going to take it now, but some unexpected moment, an unguarded moment when a thrill is within your being, will bring us together as it did when I stole the one before, then I will have my chance again." He now permitted her to draw her hand gently away and she stepped back.

"Good-night, Little Sunset," he said, and watched her face for the answer. He felt that the passion was there to turn her face up to him for a parting glance. He felt that the face was vibrating with returning love, that she was battling back a great returning emotion to yield to him now.

"Good-night, Halford," she said simply. There was no repulse, and it was as she had always spoken to him, saying his name. There was no place for hate in her, no room for it beside the hope and struggle for happiness. She was realizing that she wanted happiness again. She was just simply neutral, that was all.

"Aren't you going, Halford?" He smiled. It was just some of the pride she had stolen from him that would not let her yield. It would not take much of a crisis to turn the tide of her life back into the old passionate channel, he knew.

Stepping out into the snow he went back to his cabin, but not to sleep for many hours.

## CHAPTER XXXII

### THE CHALLENGE

The long, dreary winter at Caribou and the melting of the deep-fallen snows seemed to erode into spring with terrible resistance to the passing of time. Only once did Halford see Arda at Helen Lester's and she immediately went to her own cabin where she secluded herself as if to nurse the melancholy disappointment of her offended youth. A few times he took Little Hal to the candy store, and once he coaxed him to his own cabin for a pleasant hour. It was beginning to seem a hopeless fight for happiness.

When the snow was gone he rode Red Belle, with Tag Tail following, into the hills for a month. Though he had talked with Arda but a moment before going he still hoped for the day when the flame might again burst forth in her breast. He knew the embers were smouldering there smothered with a tempered fear. Yet he felt that she was as heartsore as he. This thought kept his hope burning. He would win, he knew he would win, for love was the ruling passion of her life, and ere long she would grow weary of resistance and yield to him.

On the banks of the creek that ran gold he dug to bedrock, then moved his tent up the creek for half a mile and commenced over again. At the end of

thirty days he returned to Caribou for grub, to find that Freddy and his pals were more insulting than before. Halford knew that they were trying to precipitate a crisis. His ignoring their taunts inflamed them to more desperate means, yet he refused to be driven from Caribou by the lawlessness of four unscrupulous men. He endured each added offense with clenched fists, knowing that open conflict would end to his disadvantage if not his death, but life was rapidly growing unendurable.

The crisis was reached one day when he was walking down the street with Little Hal. One of Freddy's pals was walking beside his friend Big Charley not far behind him.

"Dude Eastern is out airing his brat," said Freddy's pal in tones meant for the unhappy father's ears. Halford's manhood compelled accounting, anger burst into an uncontrollable flame, every muscle tingled with the insult. He slackened his pace and turned from the path for the two men to pass. When Dick Sagen came up even with him, Halford turned with all his strength and dealt him such an unexpected blow that he had no time to draw his gun as he intended to do. Sagen fell to the dust with a broken jaw, and did not get up for more than ten minutes. Turning away with unconcern Halford walked leisurely up the street, and leaving Little Hal at Arda's cabin door went to his own cabin and waited. He knew the crisis had come, but in what form they would retaliate he could only guess.

What the next move would be Halford could only wait to learn, but he knew Freddy and his pals would demand an accounting. As Halford expected, the

three pals waited for Freddy's return with the pack train from the Chilco trail. It was open challenge, and Freddy would take it up. In two weeks Freddy returned, and the fate of the Easterner was solved in the saloon amidst a lawless brawl. It was the moment for which Freddy had been waiting so long. Dude Eastern must meet him at the Meadows across the lake or acknowledge that he was a coward. The latter course would mean that Halford Chase must leave Caribou and the girl.

Arda awaited Freddy's return with growing apprehension. She knew what Freddy's decision would be, and Freddy was considered a dead shot at twenty paces. She listened to the lawless brawl at the saloon, knowing what it meant. She sat by her window looking down the street. When she saw Charlie leave the saloon and go to Halford's cabin she knew that the crisis had come. She put on her hat and went down the street to wait for Charlie to step out of the cabin door. Once she heard Halford's laugh and knew what it meant; he refused to leave Caribou. Charlie came out grave, and in a sullen mood.

"Charlie," she called to him with agitated voice. Charlie shambled to her across the street.

"Halford has accepted Freddy's challenge?" she asked. Her voice came in choking sobs.

"Yes," said Charlie. "I have his answer." The big miner's voice was grave, for he knew what the result would be, and he had come to like the pleasant Easterner, and he guessed Arda's love for him.

"You haven't delivered Halford's answer, have you, Charlie?"

"Just taking it back. They are waiting at the saloon now," said the big miner, his huge frame trembling.

"Charlie, come to my cabin for a few minutes. I want to talk to you before you give Halford's answer to Freddy."

They turned up the street. Every atom of Arda's being was trembling when she closed the door and looked appealingly up into Charlie's troubled face with tears welling to her cheeks. There was no doubt of Arda's regard for Halford Chase now. Charlie would have gladly fought that duel for the girl who stood before him with wistful, pleading eyes.

"Halford must not fight Freddy, Charlie. It means that Freddy will kill him. Halford is such a poor shot he has no chance at all."

"I know, girl, but no man can refuse and stay here," said Charlie with regret.

"I understand. He must go — away. Freddy can't kill Halford. He can't kill him," she sobbed. She was waiting as if for Charlie to solve the problem. The miner looked at her face with sympathy. "You must get him to leave Caribou. This isn't his life here. Tell him that he has no chance, that he is bound to fall. Oh, Charlie, he will go, if you tell him. He must."

"I argued with him that way for an hour, little girl, but he says he can't leave here. Funny thing, but he believes he will win. He is confident of success. Couldn't make him see it was suicide for him to accept. That is what Freddy had hoped; to get him away from Caribou."

"Oh, Charlie, won't you go back and tell him I

wish him to go, to leave here. Won't you tell him for me?" she pled. It was hard for the big miner to refuse her request, but he shook his head in the negative, and his massive face quivered.

"It's no use, little girl. Done all the arguing I am going to do, girl. No use — why don't you go. He would listen to you, he loves you, girl. I see it in his dreaming eyes."

"But, Charlie, you don't understand why I can't go to him, but he has got to leave Caribou. No, Freddy can't kill Halford —"

"Guess he's liable to do it, girl. He won't listen to sense. Says he's got to stay here." The big miner watched the waves go over her face. Love was returning now, love that she had forced to grow cold during the past five years. Charlie would rather fight the duel himself than to watch the tears well.

"Won't you go back and tell him that I sent you? Tell Halford I want him to go, tell him I would always think I had killed him if he stays here and don't come back from the meadows tomorrow. Won't you, Charlie?"

Her searching eyes saw no submission in the miner. "Done all I can, and he just whistled while I was talking and smiled at me. I'm not going back to have him smile and whistle at me again. You got to do the talking if there's any more done. He knows what he wants to do. If he wants to die at your feet, how am I going to stop him?"

"Charlie, don't say that, he don't realize his danger," she wailed. The flame was now burning the tears on her cheeks.

"And I can't make him understand. He's set on having his way. He's just set on staying here in Caribou, dead or alive. Maybe it's because you are here, girl — he didn't say."

Arda had now dried her eyes and they were burning with an anxious determination. Charlie watched the waves of swiftly changing moods that chased through the face, gloomy, then hopeful. He wanted to get away, he liked the sight of blood better than a woman's tears. They were making a child out of him.

"Then I got to go to see Halford, Charlie. I want you to wait here until I come back. Maybe I'll have to do the other," she said dreamily.

"What other, girl?"

"Will you wait here, Charlie?"

He hesitated beneath the imploring eyes.

"You must not deliver Halford's answer until I come back."

"I'll wait, girl. I half savvy he's just waiting for you to ask him to leave here. He's got a hunch you're going to go to him, girl." He sat down heavily into a chair as she hurried out of the door. If there was one thing Charlie disliked it was to be coaxed by a girl, especially by Arda.

It was but a short distance down the street to Halford's cabin, where she rapped with quick, disturbing knocks on the rough door.

"Come in."

He met her with a smile, a confident smile that added to her fears.

"Hallo, Little Sunset. You knew how my heart has been aching to see you. I knew you would come,

Little Sunset." He stepped to her as if to take her up in his arms. She shrank back and he hesitated before her.

"Halford," came her startled voice, "I couldn't help coming now. Why did you accept Freddy's challenge? He will kill you, Halford. I don't want him to kill you, I won't have Freddy kill you. You must go away. This isn't your place," she implored.

A quizzical, careless smile vibrated on his face. How anxious, how earnest she was for his welfare. The fire had commenced to burn again within her breast, the fire that illuminated the universe.

"It is my place, Little Sunset, as long as you and Little Hal are here." His calm, yet passionate words went deep into that troubled breast.

"But, Halford, you have no chance with Freddy. Won't you go away for me, Halford?" she pled.

"Yes, Little Sunset, I will go away for you and Little Hal," he said calmly.

She exulted in her triumph. He would go. He saw the change, the joy his words had brought, her happiness. He was making another happy day for her. He fancied another day was dawning for them.

"Oh, Halford," came the ecstatic voice, "I knew you would do it for me."

He caught her quickly in his arms and drew her down to him. She struggled, but she was battling the thrill, the emotion in her breast more than the embrace of the desperate lover. How she wanted to turn her lips up to him again, but she knew she must not.

He turned her face up to his and kissed her. She

was trembling with feeble resistance, for passion numbed every muscle. "Don't, oh, don't, Halford."

"But you want me to go away for you — remember, for you, Little Sunset. You will go with me. I will go any place for you, girl, but I must know that I am to have you first." Again he kissed the pallid lips.

"No, no, Halford. You must go alone, you must save yourself."

He laughed carelessly. "I knew the time would come for me to steal that kiss, Little Sunset, to make tomorrow's dawn our happy day, little girl. You are going to pray for me tonight, aren't you, Little Sunset?"

That moment's thrill left her agitated and trembling. He was refusing to go without her, when he must feel that he had no chance with Freddy, yet he refused to go. Arda came near yielding then for Halford Chase. She could save him. What greater proof of a man's love than this; he would die rather than leave her here.

"Halford, won't you go?" came her last, desperate appeal.

"If you will go with me, Little Sunset. If not, Freddy and I must meet at the Meadows tomorrow at sunrise."

That was Halford's final word, it rang with settled determination on his lips, yet he was full of emotion. He was making it hard for her to fight back that rising passion, that burning love that filled her heart. One word would save Halford. She hesitated. She went swiftly over the offense of the four years of abandonment, then the thought came that he was

taking advantage of the situation to force her into submission. She turned slowly away toward the door. "I must do the other," she thought, and reached for the latch.

"Little Sunset," he said, and she stopped. He stepped to her. "When I come back tomorrow you will let me come to see you and Little Hal, won't you?" He watched the vibrating lines of her troubled face.

She hesitated. He thought she was going to yield then. If she were only sure that his heart of steel was gone.

"You will help me, encourage me that one moment at the Meadows with that one hope for the future, won't you, Little Sunset?" he asked.

She opened the door and hurried home without answering. She was soon kneeling at Charlie's feet.

"I got to do it, Charlie," she said. He knew that Halford had refused to go, for her manner was more appealing than before she went.

"Do what, girl?" he asked.

"You got to change Halford's answer. I am going to the meadows in Halford's place. You got to make the time half an hour earlier, so Halford won't know, and when he comes it will be over. You got, just got to do it, Charlie. There is no other way, 'cause he won't go, and Freddy can't kill Halford. He's got no chance, but I have. I won't have Halford killed, I just won't. If it's going to be one of us, it's got to be me." One glance at his hard unresponsive face caused her to go on. "Do you understand, Charlie, I'm going to fight in Hal-

ford's place? Out here we have to fight for our mates, and I've got to fight for Halford, cause he's my mate."

Big Charlie looked at the girl in wonder. Her eyes, as if in a delirium, were glaring with the thought of saving her mate.

" You are crazy, girl. It's his quarrel." And so to the man she appeared to be, but she would not accept his refusal. Arda took one of his big hands in her two small ones and kissed it many times, then looked up into his honest face with a wide rim of glowing white. He got up out of his chair and forced her aside. She threw her arms about his legs and held him.

" You got to do it Charlie, you just got to do it. I won't have Halford killed. If I get Freddy, Halford can stay here; if Freddy gets me, Halford will go away. I got to do it for him, 'cause I got a chance; but Halford ain't got no chance at all. Say you will do it, Charlie. I will wait at the west end of the Meadows, in the thicket, until Freddy comes. I will be dressed in men's clothes, with mackinaw and a hat like Halford's. When I step out you give the signal to shoot at once, before Freddy suspects. It will be early, and Freddy will not know until it's all over. Charlie, you're going to do it, ain't you, for me? "

He tried to walk away, but she clung to him. A hideous smile went over her face and glistened wildly on falling tears. Again she took his rough hand and kissed it.

" You want me to get you killed, girl," he said;

but she saw that he was weakening under her passionate plea. Never before had such an appeal disturbed the breast of the fearless miner.

"But, you don't understand — I got a chance, but Halford ain't, and I won't have him killed. It's going to be just terrible if you don't do it, Charlie, just terrible, because I won't have Halford killed. I got to save him, and I got to take his place. I got to fight for my mate, just this once."

"Oh, damn it," said Charlie. Still she clung to him.

"Just tell Freddy that Halford wants to get off on the trail early; that he wants to get a very early start. It will make Freddy nervous to have Halford so confident of success. You'll do it, won't you, Charlie, for me?"

"Damn it, how am I going to refuse you, girl? You'll get Freddy."

"You just can't refuse, Charlie, 'cause it's got to be done, or something terrible will happen."

Charlie strode out of the cabin while Arda clung to his big hand, thanking him over and over. "I knew you would do it for me, Charlie."

He hesitated.

"I'm going to come back from the meadows, Charlie," she said with a smile of delight.

Charlie hurried out of the door, and Arda began preparations for the morrow under a strain of hope and ecstasy that was half delirium, half a wild, uncontrollable love that was again coming into being.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

### THE MEADOWS

That night at the Caribou bar was one of renowned hilarity. Freddy and his pals were spending Freddy's money. His time had come at last, and he was exuberant. Amidst a crowd of eager listeners and watchers, Freddy cut the sixth notch on his gun, for he was confident. When he returned from the meadows the crowd would be waiting, and there would be more drinks. Until twelve o'clock the carousal continued, then Freddy went to his cabin, watched by many solemn faces. Many had come to like Halford Chase and they knew what the outcome would be.

Halford Chase paced his cabin floor whistling, until long past twelve. It was a long, dreary night for him. He was agitated, not so much for the morrow but for the future. It was his dark hour, for even under the trying conditions Little Sunset would not go away to save him. He tried to venture cautiously into the future to plan, but they were feeble, clouded thoughts, and they came in convulsive spasms, flitting like ghosts across his vision.

Little Sunset was sleeping beside Little Hal at nine o'clock, steadying every muscle, every nerve for a quick response when the signal was sounded with that pistol shot.

Long before sunrise she was up and dressing. Taking her .45 she turned the cylinder, loaded it and slipped it back into its holster. Then she awoke Little Hal and dressed him hurriedly. A lunch was already in her saddle-bag and tied to the saddle.

"We are going away, Little Hal, and we got to get an early start," she said, lifting the child up from the pillow where he was stretching his sleepy limbs.

"We going away with the funny man, the one with the guns and the drums and things." Little Hal had seen his mother go to Halford's cabin the day before and such an unusual occurrence had put a suspicion in his troubled brain.

"Now, Little Hal, we are going away, just away and you got to go with me. We are going to the cabin through the woods."

He had now awakened and was dressed in a few minutes. She went to the hillside and led Light Foot to the cabin door and saddled him quickly. In the concealment of the early morning they rode away. Little Hal asked many questions, but she only answered him with short responses. Riding around the lake they entered the timber. It was still dark, and little Hal was still getting no answers to his numerous questions. This unusual mood of his mother was troubling him, and soon he kept silent. They soon came to a rocky bluff not far from the Meadows. It was just showing a faint glimmer of light in the east.

"We have got to wait here for a little while, Little Hal, then we go to the cabin where the gold is."

"Where we went last summer before the funny man came?" asked Little Hal.

"Yes, where we went last summer before the snow came, so Halford could not find us," she answered.

"Don't you want him to find us again, mamma? Are we going with the funny man, are we going to wait for the funny man here?"

"No, Little Hal, we are going alone."

"Ain't the funny man ever coming to see us again, and bring me lots of things? Can't I ever hunt bears with him, mamma?" persisted Little Hal. Arda felt that tears were coming to her eyes. She tied Light Foot to a tree under a rocky bluff and then sat Little Hal down on the grass and watched for the coming day. She was calm now, and every muscle was like steel. She had hardened every nerve for the day.

Soon she bent down and kissed Little Hal.

"I got to go out in the woods for a few minutes, Little Hal. You must wait here until I come back." The child looked up into her eyes dubiously. He knew that something was wrong, in spite of her efforts not to reveal her thoughts to him.

"You coming right back, mamma?" he asked with wide, inquiring eyes.

She gave a shudder before answering. "In just a few minutes," she assured.

Something in her manner was filled with alarm, for he asked, "You *sure* you are coming back, mamma?"

"Yes, Little Hal, quite sure — but — but — if I shouldn't come back you will go to Halford Chase,

won't you?" she asked, kissing him. Her manner was different than he had ever seen and he now threw his arms about her neck and clung to her tightly.

"Was he the funny man who brought the gun and the drum and things?" he asked.

"Yes, Little Hal, and you will go to him if I shouldn't come back, won't you?" she implored. She was struggling to keep back her tears and to hold her voice steady.

"Ain't you sure you are going to come back, mamma? I don't want you to go if you ain't sure," he said, clinging to her with frightened, trembling arms.

"Yes, I am sure, Little Hal, but, you know — you will go to him won't you, if I don't?"

"Yes, mamma."

It had now grown quite light in the eastern sky, but still the forest was gray in the dawn. Arda heard voices in the direction of the Meadows.

"And you will call him papa, won't you, Little Hal, if you should go to him?"

"I never called him that." He looked up at her puzzled, startled.

"But he *is* your papa, Little Hal, and he will like you if you call him that. Won't you, Little Hal?"

"Yes, mamma."

Arda climbed the rocks, and in the concealment of the thicket she made her way toward the Meadows. A voice came through the spruce grove. It was Freddy's voice, and it filled Arda with hatred. She clenched her little hands and her teeth closed on her pallid lips.

"Where is Dude Eastern? Bring him out. Is he saying his prayers or is he finishing digging his grave?" taunted Freddy. He was anxious to justify that notch he had placed on his gun the night before. He was ready, too ready.

Then came Charlie's voice. "Mr. Chase?"

Arda glanced back to the rocky bluff where Little Hal was waiting. "I will come back to you, Little Hal," came in audible tones. Then she let her skirt drop down and kneeling she said, "God of the North, God of the wilderness, kind God, I am doing it for him, because he's my mate. I got to fight for my mate. Save him and me, kind God."

She arose and hurried through the thicket, dressed in overalls and mackinaw, a wide-brimmed hat shadowed her face. Through the screen of the thicket she saw Freddy pacing in his anxiousness to have the battle over. His gun was hanging at his side. Charlie was ready to give the signal with a pistol shot, so that neither would have the advantage in firing before a count of three could be made. Freddy must have heard the movement of the thicket for he stopped, facing her, and Arda stepped quickly to the open.

It was quickly done. She had just stepped into the open when the report came. Charlie had planned it that way so there would be no time for recognition.

What a sensitive ear, what a quick raising of her gun, and her aim was as sure as her muscles were rapid in their movements. As on the day when she shot with Freddy to save her kisses for the picture she knew she must win. There were two reports coming almost like a single shot. Freddy's aim went

into the ground not more than twenty feet in front of him and then he reeled and fell. His seconds hurried to him. Arda turned into the thicket, her heart throbbing now that the tension was gone.

Charlie and Frank hurried across the meadow where Freddy had fallen, and where his two pals were holding him up. Soon he relaxed, and they let him down to the meadow grass.

Then came a whistle through the timber from the direction of the camp. Charlie and Frank turned into the wood and hurried in the direction the whistle came. He must not meet Freddy's pals here, or there might yet be trouble. They met Halford coming to the meadows.

"Why did you leave me to come alone?" asked Halford indignantly.

"It's all over, Mr. Chase, turn back."

Halford looked Charlie squarely in the eye.

"What is over?"

"The duel. Arda fought it for you. Freddy has fallen."

A cloud went across the morning dawn. Halford reached out for something to support himself.

"What is that you are saying? Little Sunset took my place?"

"Yes, Mr. Chase, it's all settled between you and Freddy. Through the heart, and he hadn't even leveled his gun to his eye."

Halford Chase trembled like a leaf in a chilly autumn wind.

"You let her do it?" he asked with a flash.

"We couldn't help it, Mr. Chase. She said you had no chance. She wouldn't have Freddy kill you."

Said she must fight for her mate. She knew she would win. God, what an aim, how quickly it was done." Halford's gaze went to the ground.

"Where is she, Charlie?"

The big miner shook his head. He had heard galloping horse's feet going north through the forest as he came away from the meadows. "We did not ask her. She made us fix the time a little earlier without your knowing so you wouldn't get killed. He would have got you, Mr. Chase. She knows how to protect a mate; it was like a flash. If Freddy's heart had been a magnet and the bullet of iron the aim could not have been truer."

"Suppose Freddy had got her? I would have made you pay."

His eyes flashed revengefully. "Yes, I would have made you pay."

"We could not help it. Something worse would have happened. She wouldn't tell us what it would have been. She said you had no chance and she did. She said if Freddy killed her you could go away and save yourself and take Little Hal with you. That you refused to go without her."

"Yes, I said that." Halford said half in a dream, "I couldn't go without her. So it's all over and she is safe."

"Yes," said Charlie, turning toward the camp.

Halford hurried back to Caribou. Going to her cabin he found the door locked and Light Foot missing from the hill. He waited anxiously for more than an hour for her return, but she did not come.

What a love he had come near missing! She had done it for him, she loved him still. It was very

plain to him now. He must just simply take her, for she would never answer him. She was his, and he must claim his possession without regard to her refusal.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

### THE ANSWERED CALL

Halford knew that he must find Arda. The flame was kindled and would burn out her very soul, but she would never consent. His offence had been terrible, and always would she resist until he conquered her and forced down the barrier. He knew he must seek her out of the desolate north. She had gone, to the north and on into the dim horizon that had been dimmed and dimmed again until it left a shudder at every step, yet he knew he must find her.

Three hours after Freddy had fallen in the Meadows Halford mounted Red Belle, and Tag Tail followed into the desolation, into the vast wilderness. For a time he could follow her trail. Here and there he saw the cut of hoofs on the mountainside.

"We must find her now, Red Belle, after what she has done for us — we just *got* to find her. She wants us to find her and just take her by storm and rob her of all those kisses we hurled back at her, without giving her a chance to exert that negative determination of hers. We just can't take 'no' this time, we got to force down every barrier, every defense until there is *no* refusal left." So Halford soliloquized as he went searching for the dim trail. He went over a ridge and through a flat, and on the next hill he again saw the newly made print of a

horse's hoofs. Here the track entered an old and abandoned trail, and his heart swelled with hope; an old trail which led in the direction she was going, to some retreat her father had formed long ago, perhaps, where she had gotten the nuggets she had given him the day Red Lightning took him to Caribou Meadows. The trail was worn very shallow in the hill, and in the flats it was impossible to follow, still he searched and that night camped under a big fir-tree.

The next morning he was out early and searching. Again he found the trail and a single horse track that had disturbed the mat of fallen, brown pine-needles. She was following the trail and it would lead him to her if he could but keep to it. It led over a divide to another creek whose waters ran in a different direction; and on the summit were patches of snow. The trail led through a gap, then down into a broad creek bottom. It was here the trail evaded him often, and he came near losing his way; but he knew he must keep on. He went across the meadow and circled the hill, and it was after three o'clock before he found it with the single horse track leading to the north, always to the north, to the very rim of Arda's world and mountains. A great exultation came over him as he followed for more than a mile around a side hill where the earth was soft, and the trail cut deep in the mountainside. Yes, he was calling to the mate, and it was as he thought it should be in the beginning; the right of the man to call and of the woman to answer. But he had been mistaken then, and as he mounted to the crest of the ridge and started down he began to sing.

Two hearts have made the call to the mate  
Meeting like moonbeams out in the lake,  
Filled with distress;  
Both were an answer, both were a call,  
Both have endured the shock of a fall,  
Out of the nest.

Yes, it was as it should be. Five years ago she had called to him, and he had answered. Now he was calling to her, and he was going to have her answer. No, it was not for man alone, both must call to the mate and both must answer. Then he lost the trail and instead of song came a plaintive whistle.

He camped again under a fir, and in the morning searched for the trail.

"We just got to have her answer, Red Belle," and he passed over another ridge and the trail was lost again. For an hour he searched for it, then came a gun shot and Red Belle sank down under him and he rolled to the ground.

A crowd had gathered at the Caribou saloon to wait for Freddy's return. They saw Halford Chase start around the lake to the Meadows and heard his whistle coming clearly as he went care-free to his fate. Then came the two pistol-shots. What could have happened, for they knew Halford had not reached the Meadows. Soon they saw him coming back with Frank and Charlie. The two seconds went to the saloon. Freddy's pal with the broken jaw now healed made emphatic inquiries of Charlie, but both men were as emphatic in their declaration that it was over and that Freddy had fallen, shot through

the heart. Sagen paced the floor and there was the most profound silence in the Caribou bar that had ever invested the north.

Freddy, the dead shot, had fallen! What did it mean? No one could understand, and the silence did not explain. Soon the other two pals came in hurriedly, out of breath.

"We have been tricked by the damned Dude Easterner."

The crowd gathered around. Freddy's last moment was one of recognition. The quick aim, the accurate bead over the gun barrel had told him and when his seconds came to his aid and raised up his head he whispered. "Arda — she came in his place," and Freddy sank back dead.

For a moment there was a dead silence in Caribou bar.

"What do you think of the coward?" said the pal with the broken jaw. "Sent a girl to fight for him. Are we going to stand for such a man right here in Caribou?" Again there was a silence, and Halford's friends drew away.

"Let Freddy's friends who are willing to avenge his death step to the bar and drink," shouted one of the three. No one made a response, no one joined the three at the bar, so they drank alone. Every man in Caribou knew what Arda's fighting in Halford's place meant, and so they sat while the three drank to vengeance. The three men went across to the Meadows and buried Freddy where he had fallen, then gathered their horses into camp, and a silent, pervading whisper went up in Caribou.

Arda heard a shot and went to the door of the cabin which stood over the dim horizon. Then came three more shots in rapid succession. No man had ever come to Willow Creek to disturb the silence, so far as she knew, but to-day some one had come. In that shot was alarm, a fearful premonition of danger. She looked into the timber and ringed the horizon, but she saw nothing. The shots had come from over the ridge to the west, for they were muffled by the rocks. She buckled her six-shooter about her waist and taking her rifle in her hand told Little Hal to remain at the cabin until she returned.

Arda climbed the ridge. There were two more shots and they rang out clear over its crest, as she climbed the hill. At the top she crouched down and looked over into an open meadow not more than two hundred yards in diameter. She had no doubt that a wandering prospector had encountered a cinnamon bear, and was very likely in close quarters. Quickly her eye covered the basin but there was no movement. Then a hundred and fifty yards down the hill at the edge of the meadow she saw a man standing behind a tree. A rifle was in his hand in readiness to shoot, his eyes were alert, full of fear, wild and searching. It was Halford.

A shiver went over her, for there was a signal of danger in the fear-stricken face. He was looking up the hill not far from where she lay. A rifle shot rang out and she saw a man drop behind a rock a short distance down the hill. Her muscles went hard and tense as the situation dawned like a flash upon her. She turned to Halford standing behind

the tree. He was running across the open meadow to gain the shelter of a rock not more than thirty feet from the tree where he stood. Two more rifle shots rang out, and Halford fell headlong upon the ground and crawled to the shelter of the boulder. Her heart cried out with fear and despair.

She drew up her rifle and soon had located the three men not far apart behind rocks. They were Freddy's pals. The one farthest from her, perhaps, a hundred and fifty yards away, ran to another boulder and the one nearest her rose up and looked to the ridge where she lay and started toward her. Gaining the shelter of a tree he searched the rock behind which Halford was concealed, kneeling. Halford was not dead, for he had his gun in readiness and his face had a terrible expression. It was plain that the three men were making an effort to surround the boulder in the meadow. The man nearest her was endeavoring to gain the shelter of the ridge where she lay. A hideous smile came to her face. Just as he jumped from his hiding place Arda's eye went over her rifle and he fell.

The other two pals dropped behind rocks, evidently surprised by the shot coming from her direction. For a moment she watched the fallen man, but he did not move and his rifle was thrown several feet away. There was no danger from him. She knew she had the advantage under the protection of the ridge, but the two remaining pals were out of view behind rocks. She crawled on hands and knees up the ridge and could now see them plainly. They were talking to each other, planning, no doubt, a

safe means of escape now that an unknown enemy had come.

Arda's aim was at the one, perhaps, two hundred yards down the hill. She saw the dust fly up far down the bottom and knew she had overshot. A second shot rang quickly out and the man settled down and his rifle went to the ground. In a desperation the third pal made for the opposite ridge. Halford was crouched down, thinking the shots were meant for him. The third pal was now in the meadow, and Halford's rifle rang out, but the man kept on. Arda drew aim and shot four times in rapid succession, then the man went over the ridge, but whether he had fallen or sank out of view down the ridge she could not tell. The first two lay quiet and still. Arda rounded the ridge to the west and saw that the last man was lying in the open. Looking about Arda saw Red Belle lying where she had fallen and across another meadow she saw four horses ranging in an opening. She hurried back to the ridge where she could get a view of the rock where Halford was watching, not daring to expose herself for fear he might mistake her for one of the enemy.

"Halford," she shouted. Instead of rising, he only sank down. Again she shouted to him. This time he answered, and jumping up she ran down the slope to him.

"Gods, Little Sunset, I thought they had me this time." His eyes were wild yet appreciative. "You got them all, little girl."

She only sank down to the wound in his leg.

"Little Sunset, how did you get here? I thought I was alone. They would have surrounded me in a few minutes, and it would have been the end." He was trembling with relaxation. She bent over him and placing her thumb, pressed hard on the throbbing artery to stop the flow of blood.

"Did they hit you anywhere else, Halford?"

"Just there, Little Sunset."

"I got to get you over to the cabin," she said.

"To the cabin!" he exclaimed. "You got a cabin here — close?"

"It's only about half a mile. Can you walk with my help, Halford?" Still she held the throbbing artery and her thumb was growing numb.

"I can do anything with your help, Little Sunset. It isn't so bad. In fact the pain of it isn't near so great as another pain that throbs within me."

Releasing the wound she tore the bottom off her heavy woolen skirt and tied it around his leg just above the pulsing flow of blood. Then she took him by the arm and raised him to his feet. He sank back against the boulder for a moment, watching her face.

"We will go around the point and up the creek bottom, Halford. It will be level all the way." But Halford did not make a movement to start. He was busily watching her face, it was eager, anxious, imploring. He fancied the night had gone from it.

"It isn't so very bad, Little Sunset." She looked up to him imploringly to get him to start.

"Can't you walk, Halford? I got to get you to the cabin." He ignored her anxiousness for his welfare.

"I knew I must find you after that day at the Meadows, Little Sunset. I knew I just had to find you, girl!" He must have it over before he took one step toward the cabin. He caught her in his arms and drew her down against the boulder with him. He turned her face up to his and kissed through the tears.

"We must hurry, Halford!"

"I been searching three days for you, Little Sunset, and I have been calling all the time. Couldn't you hear me, Little Sunset, didn't you hear me?" he went on, to have the great problem settled before they gave attention to the wound. He held her to him and kissed her many times.

"Oh, Halford, don't—please don't—yes, I heard you—Halford, and I been answering, just answering every time you called." She did not turn her face away in resistance now. There was nothing to do but yield, all resistance had gone.

"Yes, Halford, I'm your mate now. You will never go away again, will you, Halford, now that I've answered—will you?"

"No, Little Sunset."

She helped him around the point and soon they came to a view of the cabin up the creek.

"This is where you got the nuggets you gave me the day Red Lightning took me to the Caribou Meadows," said Halford.

"Yes, Halford, I been saving them all for you."

"And we shall take them out of the ground together, Little Sunset!"

"Yes, Halford."

Soon they saw Little Hal running down the bottom

to meet them. "Wait, mamma," he was insisting, half in tears.

They stopped to wait for him to run to them.

"What do you want, Little Hal?" asked Arda, fearing that something had gone wrong with the child.

"I want to help bring papa home."

Halford looked down at Little Sunset's upturned face with a smile.

"You been teaching him to say that, Little Sunset?" asked Halford.

"I knew it must come, soon, very soon. I knew I must answer you, I knew I would after that day at the meadows."

"So you are taking my name at last, are you, and you know I want you to have it, don't you, Little Sunset, you and Little Hal?"

"You *do* want us to have it?"

"Yes, Little Sunset."

With Little Hal's help she took Halford to the cabin and dressed the wound, which did not hurt so much now that the one in his breast had healed. His heart had expanded to the level of the deep sincerity of the wide, waste places of the north.